

WHITE WRITINGS: COLONIALISM AND MODERNISM IN
SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE SINCE 1970

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation develops from the contention that a significant body of the literary activity of white South Africans since the 1970s can be characterised as a form of modernism. This characterisation devolves less upon the formal attributes of a body of literary writing than upon the particular position it occupies in the cultural sphere during this period. That position is one of political and cultural marginality. White writing is distanced from both the official culture of the state and an emergent populist culture associated with the urban social collectivities that begin to play an increasingly important role in the political life of South African society during the 1970s. In an introductory section, a comparison is drawn between the responses to social marginality within South African white writing and the reconsiderations of the political mission of literature by Jean-Paul Sartre and Roland Barthes, formulated in post-War France. The first chapter sets out a brief description of the crisis that besets the South African social formation during the 1970s. The racial logic upon which the South African economy and social order is subtended comes under attack from two related sources. The first is the growing economic and political instability of the racial-capitalist system, while the second is renewed resistance to the manifest racially-ordered inequalities sponsored by that system. As discussed in the second chapter, this gathering crisis of their society impells white writers and intellectuals to question and revise long-held paradigms of thought and practices of representation, drawing on the resources of comparable revisions of established paradigms taking place in western thought. Equally, these writers and intellectuals become concerned with the critical re-examination of established accounts of the ethical vocation

and social function of intellectual and literary work. But white writers and intellectuals were, in the polarised political conditions of the 1970s, unable to find a home in emergent internal opposition organisations predicated, for the most part, on versions of an anti-colonial nationalism. In the third chapter, consideration is given to the critique that begins to circulate in the period, of the associations of the South African literary and literary-critical establishment with the interests of white hegemony. This critique leads white writers such as Nadine Gordimer and JM Coetzee to reject a literary tradition found to be rooted in a colonial past and embodying colonial assumptions that are no longer tenable. This rejection of their cultural patrimony leads white writers to seek new ways of imagining the relationship between their writing and their society, as well as new forms capable of representing that altered relationship. At the same time however, this critical reflection upon the coloniality of established literary practices and forms, distances white writing from the populist and realist concerns of writers associated with emergent oppositional cultural formations. Developments during the 1970s serve to make the cultural sphere an important zone of political contestation. In the fourth chapter some of the tactics and manoeuvres in this contest are discussed. White writers adopt a modernist defence of their relative isolation from political actuality and their failure to conform to the requirements of a socially-committed literature. The development of a body of committed literature by black writers is discussed. However, the formal inconsistency of this literature's relationship to "realism" indicates that in the South African situation, "realism" and "modernism" are less a matter of the formal characteristics of a given body of literary work than a description of the differentiations in the audience, social function and ambitions of white and black writing. The dissertation is therefore aimed at providing an account of the historical ground that gives rise to this

racial division of literature and literary activity in South Africa. Such an account serves to historicise and contextualise the various positions on commitment, artistic responsibility, the politicisation of art and the question of the capacity of cultural organisations to prescribe the form or content of artistic production, which are the subject of controversy in present-day South Africa.

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INTRODUCTION

I

This study turns upon three delimitations of the terrain of recent South African literature. First, I am concerned with the South African literary formation--the activities of writers, readers and literary institutions--in South Africa during the 1970s and early 1980s, and, second, with a particular aspect of those activities centred on the criticism or defence of a body of literature identifiable as "white writing". Third, I am concerned with the contention that a significant portion of the white writing of this period can be characterised as bearing the features or occupying the cultural space of a modernism.¹ My principal interest in the literary activity of this period, is the extent to which, along the lines of European Modernism, it is a narrativisation of a crisis of representation. Faced with the growing crisis of their society and its authorised systems of representation, white writers and intellectuals were confronted with the necessity of finding forms of thought and language to replace those once thought natural or unavoidable but which were increasingly becoming contested. The texts and debates that emerge are, to varying degrees, concerned with the social and historical implications of literary form, foregrounding what Adorno described as "the laws of their own forms, laws which are aesthetically rooted in their own social content" (Adorno et al, 1977: 166). Moreover, as a product of its growing cultural isolation, the literary activity of the period carries out a critical revision of the possibilities and restrictions of its own social and political affiliations, exploring the limits of its cultural constituency. The

disturbance of the South African social order disturbs in turn what Peter Bürger has termed "the institutionalized discourse about art" associated with that social order (1984: 13). The events of the 1970s therefore call into question accepted ideas about the definition, constitution and reception of "literature". Specifically, I argue, the modernist white writing of this period can be read as performing a negative critique of the coloniality of the discredited liberal literary aesthetic. White writing sets itself against its own line of literary descent, revealing the institution of literature in South Africa and the "tradition" it promotes to be colonial in its origins and in the interests it serves. Further, modernist white writing exhibits a more or less critical orientation towards the aesthetic discourses competing to replace liberal-realism: on the one hand, the metropolitanism or universalism of Western structuralism, poststructuralism and postmodernism, and on the other, the defensive, essentialising and inhibitive tendencies of cultural nationalism.

Following Gramsci, the existence of a condition of crisis in a society "means that incurable structural contradictions have revealed themselves" (1978: 178). It is as an attempt to map the terrain of political struggle that develops in response to such a crisis, the "occasional, immediate, almost accidental" terrain of the conjunctural (Gramsci, 1978: 177), that this study of some of the literary phenomena produced within that terrain is structured. Accordingly, I am interested in giving an account of the social and cultural context which gave rise to the crisis of representation bodied forth in the texts of the period and in the literary-critical field in general. The various forms and levels of conflict that develop within the context of the crisis are the dynamic forces which give direction to the white writing of the period. But while the texts of the period bear the traces of the wider historical forces that shape them, it is clear that they are at the same time forms of significant action taken

in response to those forces. Thus, while I argue that this writing is not isolated from political struggle or the social terrain it occupies, it does not follow that it should be treated as simply a more or less accurate reflection of the vicissitudes of struggle and historical event. Rather, it is itself a participant in the conflict of forces, it is a form of action as well as a form of reaction in response to the crisis in which it finds itself.

To characterise a body of literature as a version of modernism may seem to require a focus on the formal characteristics of literary texts. However, I am interested less in literary form itself than in the ideas about literary form and the activity of writing that are in general circulation during this period. I am concerned with modernist white writing as an intellectual-cultural phenomenon and with the context in which it is located, rather than with its literary virtues. According to Raymond Williams, the activity of cultural materialism entails "the analysis of all forms of signification, including quite centrally writing, with the actual means and conditions of their production" (1981: 64-5). Williams's emphasis is upon the analytic act of elucidating the social ground and the ideological interests of texts which, in the case of literary writing, may give the appearance of being remote from historical actuality or political controversy. But, in the case of the South African writing of the 1970s, the extension of political obligation to cultural activity as a result of a general crisis that develops on all levels of society, necessitates that writers give an account of the value and reach of their work, and of the interests it serves. My aim here is to examine the apprehensions of South African writers of the "actual means and conditions" impeding or promoting their work during this period. I am interested in drawing from such apprehensions an account of the strategies and conduct of literary writers and intellectuals upon the Gramscian "terrain of battle" that the cultural sphere becomes during

the 1970s. The questions I ask of both the literature and the writing about that literature of the period are: what charges are levelled against the activity of literary writing in a situation of crisis?; how do writers defend themselves and their work?

Accordingly, two central ideas about writing that circulate during this period form the key terms of this study. The first is that the writing of white South Africans is distinguishable from that of black. This distinction is the result of, on the one hand, white writing's distance from the struggle for national liberation and the repression of that struggle by the state, and, on the other, its proximity to the institutions of white power. The second is that its distance from the exigencies of combat allows white writing a limited autonomy from politically-instrumental uses of writing, investing it with the modernist mission of, in Adorno's phrase, "wordlessly asserting what is barred to politics" (Adorno et al, 1977: 194). However, this same autonomy makes white writing susceptible to charges similar to those levelled by Lukács against Modernism; it is "objectively elitist and thus estranged from 'the people' in every practical sense" (Adorno et al, 1977: 14). My aim in tracing the development of these ideas is to further an understanding of the social function of "literature" and its attendant discourses in a context of the systematic crisis of an entire social formation.

II

My point of departure is JM Coetzee's characterisation of the literature of a group of people inhabiting a situation that is neither colonial nor postcolonial. "White writing"--to give the term its broadest definition--is the literature of the whites of South Africa. It is an anxious and introspective body of writing, such as could be expected of "such unsettled settlers with so uncertain a future"

(Coetzee, 1988b: 4). While the term embraces the literature associated with the entire history of white settlement, I am concerned here with the white writing of what Coetzee describes as a "new, neocolonial" period in recent South African history, most precisely in what can be identified as the terminal phase of that period (1988b: 11).

The tentative steps South Africa had taken away from European influence since Union in 1910 were inhibited by the country's participation on the side of Britain in the Second World War (Rich, 1985: 47). Then, as Coetzee points out, "[i]n 1948 a party of Afrikaner nationalists came to power and began to sever political and cultural ties with Europe; as apartheid began to be implemented, moral ties were severed too; and far from being the dubious colonial children of a far-off motherland, white South Africans graduated to uneasy possession of their own, less and less transient internal colony" (1988b: 11). The waning political and cultural influence of Britain and the growing isolation of the new republic from its former metropole and the remnants of the Empire, meant that the English-speaking fraction of the white population was compelled to make its peace with Afrikaner nationalism and to contend with the necessity of identifying itself in local terms. In 1961, the remaining formal connections with the British Empire were dismantled. By these acts, the white settlers of South Africa disconnected themselves from their European cultural legacy, becoming Africans in name, though not in identity (1988b: 8). In this still-uncompleted period of South African history, the settlers continued to write a literature in the languages and forms of left-behind Europe. But the appearance of decolonisation movements on a worldwide scale, and, closer to home, the awakening of militant black nationalism, was, more than ever, to bring home to them the impermanence of their tenure and its dependence

upon practices of domination and possession that were no longer defensible.

Whatever troubled sense of their identity, origins and prospects white writers had hitherto embodied in their literature, was called into question by the sense that the colonial order that had underwritten it was coming to crisis. As a consequence, the white writing of the period finds itself sceptically re-examining its cultural patrimony, re-evaluating its understanding of its society and its place within it. "It is in culture", Edward Said has remarked, "that we can seek out the range of meanings and ideas conveyed by the phrases belonging to or in a place, being at home in a place" (Said, 1983: 8). It then marks considerable disturbance in a culture and the social institutions that support it, when its writers and intellectuals dismiss the concepts of belonging they had held in the past, and, at times, question even the possibility of belonging in the future.

The term "colonialism" denotes immemorial processes of territorial ambition and conquest, and the domination (or, in some cases, the attempted eradication) of subject-populations. According to Abdul JanMohammed, the practice of colonialism is best understood as occupying two distinct historical phases. In the first, "dominant" phase, "European colonizers exercise direct and continuous bureaucratic control and military coercion of the natives: during this phase the "consent" of the natives is primarily passive and indirect" (1985: 80). The "hegemonic" or "neocolonial" phase is marked by the "natives' internalisation" of "a version of the colonizer's entire system of values, attitudes, morality, institutions, and, more important, mode of production" (1985: 81). The imprecision of the term "native" should not detract from the correspondence of JanMohammed's analysis of an ideal-typical "colonial situation" to the "neocolonial" phase of South African history described by Coetzee.

The mechanisms of control established by British colonialism passed, with independence, into the hands of a creole minority. This minority developed a range of material and ideological practices aimed at the maintenance of their hegemony. These practices included the establishment of ideological mechanisms designed to convince the oppressed as well as those identified with the oppressing group of the appropriateness and inevitability of their respective positions. Included within the mechanisms of white hegemony are a limited repertoire of oppositional positions, including the political and cultural tradition of South African liberalism. The 1970s see a series of fundamental challenges to that white hegemony, and consequently a serious disturbance of the "system of values, attitudes, morality, institutions" associated with it. Indeed, the escalating social conflicts of the period were to place even the survival of the capitalist order itself in doubt. The crisis of established practices of white hegemony gives rise to a number of rearticulations of the relationship between white domination and the economy, attesting to a fundamental crisis of the "neocolonial" order and the systems intended to keep it in place.

The white writing of the period thus forms part of a wider process which sees white intellectuals increasingly alienated from the structures of cognition and value supplied by a culture associated with a "neocolonial" order in terminal decline. I am concerned to situate white writing within the context it shares with other forms of elite intellectual production. The 1970s saw the formation of a loose affiliation of left-inclined intellectuals across a number of traditional academic fields. This affiliation is generally described as the "revisionist movement", though the term imparts a sense of coherence of purpose and practice that is inaccurate. Whatever the complexities of ideological orientation and disciplinary allegiance among its practitioners, this movement was united in its rejection of

the liberal-humanist consensus which had dominated oppositional intellectual practice in South Africa. But if it was consistent in its rejection of its past, the movement showed no such uniformity in its attitude towards its future. The political conditions of the period offered little prospect of a self-confident white intellectual practice with organic links to the emergent social forces of the period. It is not surprising then that both the revisionist discourse and the white writing of the 1970s shows all the signs of the considerable cultural instability and insecurity that gives rise to it. Consequent developments in the cultural and intellectual sphere tend to dispose themselves around one of two positions. On the one hand, intellectual work gravitates towards a form of avantgardism, claiming a deep transgressivity for theoretically-informed and socially-detached reflection. On the other hand, particularly in the case of the modernist white writing I consider here, it performs a scrupulous self-critique, a meditation upon the intolerable situation it finds itself occupying and upon its own powerlessness to change it.

If the crisis of the racial order within South Africa precipitated a revision of long-held practices of representation, it is clear that this phenomenon has an important analogue in the global process of disassembly and reconstruction of colonial systems that follows the Second World War. The disturbance of the physical structures of colonial power by the decolonisation movement undermined, in turn, the practices of thought and culture associated with and maintained by Western dominance. The subsequent efforts at the decolonisation of Western culture then form part of the contemporary "cultural crisis" of the West, a crisis most generally understood by reference to the reorganisation of the cultural sphere of which postmodernism is both product and precipitant (Young, 1990: 119). The connection between anticolonial mobilisation and the exposure of the relations of power underlying Eurocentric and

ethnocentric systems of representation has been thoroughly mapped in recent work on colonial and postcolonial cultural politics.² According to Said, the practice of Orientalism (in its widest sense, a discourse aimed at naturalising and replicating relationships of domination of the West over the non-West) was made possible by the denial of the ability of the non-West to represent itself (1978: 1-28). The variety of forms and styles available to the discourse of Western hegemony are expressive of the enforced silence of the Orient, and the consequent authority of the West to speak in its name. The result is an effacement of the presence of the Other in the discourses of authority, it is present only as re-presentation, as proxy: "The value, efficacy, strength, apparent veracity of a written statement about the Orient ... is a presence to the reader by virtue of its having excluded, displaced, made supererogatory any such real thing as 'the Orient'" (Said, 1978: 21). Accordingly, decolonisation entails the accession by the objects of Western representation of the power to speak for themselves, thereby challenging the grounds of legitimation of representative Western discourses which claimed to speak on behalf of other cultures, or in some cases, for the human species in general. Decolonisation overturns the conditions that made possible the authoritative representation of the Other, thereby occasioning a generalised crisis of the Western sign and of its ideological correlatives--"empiricism, idealism, mimeticism, monoculturalism" (Bhabha, 1985: 166).

"In the colonial context", claims Fanon, "the settler only ends his work of breaking in the native when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the white man's values. In the period of decolonisation, the colonised masses mock at these very values, insult them and vomit them up" (Fanon, 1967: 33). Fanon's remarks pinpoint two important implications of decolonisation for Western culture and theory. Instead of a detached sphere of representations,

anti-colonial discourse reveals Western culture to be an active bearer of power, complicit in the processes of colonisation. This revelation then effectively imbues cultural activity with considerable political significance. In the hands of the coloniser, culture comes to be seen as an instrument for the domination of colonised peoples. In the hands of the colonised, it is a vehicle for nationalist mobilisation against the coloniser. In both versions, cultural production is believed to be closely allied to political and economic interests. Further, a vigorous application of Fanon's dialectical strategy of reversal of the colonisation processes necessitates an uncompromising rejection of Western culture, and the emancipatory credentials of Western humanism. The anti-humanism associated with decolonisation "questions the use of the human as an explanatory category that purports to provide a rational understanding of 'man'--an assumed universal predicated on the exclusion and marginalization of his Others, such as 'woman' or 'the native'" (Young, 1990: 122). As Fanon's metaphor of disgorgement demonstrates, once Western culture is exposed as a document of barbarism, none of its emancipatory or humanistic credentials can be retrieved by, or reassimilated into the postcolonial project.

While the austere dialectical simplicities of Fanon's theorisation are not matched by the actual history of decolonisation³, it is important to recognise their power over the ideologies and strategies of national liberation. The colonial situation of which Fanon writes is one under the rule of the logic of identity. The colonial administrative apparatus operates by marking out an identifiable degenerate population: "the objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (Bhabha, 1986: 154). The constitution of the colonial territory by operation of the

logic of identity creates identitarian mechanisms of exclusion and control, and, in turn dictates the range of available oppositional positions that can be taken up by forces opposed to the colonial order. Accordingly, anticolonialism is similarly identitarian in form, incited and restricted by the ineluctable and highly visible factor of race:

We have said that the colonial context is characterised by the dichotomy which it imposes upon the whole people. Decolonization unifies that people by the radical decision to remove from it its heterogeneity, and by unifying it on a national, sometimes a racial basis. ... That is to say that the native can see clearly and immediately if decolonization has come to pass or no, for his minimum demands are simply that the first shall be last. (Fanon, 1967: 35)

In South Africa, the rapid spread of communications and market systems during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries meant that the original fortuitous geography of colonial administration had long since acquired the "firmer reality" that gives meaning to national consciousness (Anderson, 1983: 54). The expanding and tightening system of racial exploitation gave further credibility to nationalist assertions. The state's repression of the pluralist Congress Alliance which had dominated resistance politics since 1948, encouraged the direction of the energies of emergent social collectivities into a form of binary nationalism, aimed at delivering an oppressed black nation from the rule of the white state and its benefactors. At their most basic, the ideologies of this nationalism reduced the South African social formation to a single contradiction: that between the white nation and a black nation-in-the-making. More complex versions held that the struggle for national liberation was a necessary and prior vehicle for addressing the second significant contradiction in South African society, that between classes. A later version held that national and class struggle in South Africa were in fact one, due to the coincidence of race and class in the peculiar South African

phenomenon of "racial capitalism" (Alexander, 1985: 2-3). All of these versions attempt to account for the visibility of a central, colonial-type division in South African society, and give priority to forms of anti-colonial resistance to it.

During the 1970s, the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement saw a sustained attack on the destructive and colonising implications of white culture. This rejection of white hegemony included nominally-oppositional white elite cultural and intellectual activity, condemning the Eurocentric liberal academy as an ideological extension of the settler state. Emergent anti-colonial discourses gave considerable weight to the capacities of cultural work to overcome colonial distortions and to foster the self-affirmation necessary for liberation. This flurry of antagonistic cultural activity confronts white intellectuals with the "disruptive articulation" of people formerly the subjects of their authoritative representations (Said, 1989: 223). Emergent anti-colonial and nationalist forces and the destabilisation of the racial order to which they contributed, thus undermined the casual habits of identity and orientation of white writers and intellectuals, requiring a critical revision of established systems of meaning and value.

III

In his survey of South African English literature, Malvern van Wyk Smith gives a usefully condensed description of the formal and thematic preoccupations of modernist white writings:

The urgent defamiliarization of the South African "reality" has become a major enterprise of almost all current serious [white] writing. Irony, satire, disoriented narratives, obsessive confessionals, fabulation, and metafictional speculation are some of the means to which contemporary white writers resort. Thus they translate the failure of the South African polity to come to humane and sane accommodations as a "failure" of traditional narrative modes, in which the author/narrator occupies a site of

divine omniscience, authority and manipulation. Increasingly, therefore, modes of social realism, chronological narration and a detached point of view have been abandoned by deeply destabilized mentalities. "A state of emergency" has come to occupy the republic of white letters as well, in sharp contrast to the confidence of affirmative socio-political black writing. (1990: 122)

Van Wyk Smith's account brings to the foreground an important feature of the South African cultural terrain of the past two decades. To describe a body of writing as modernist entails setting it against its "historical counterpart and its dialectical mirror image" (Jameson, 1977: 198)--in this case a form of populist-realism⁴. The modernist tendency in South African literature thus emerges at the same time as an aesthetically and racially distinct countertendency. The 1970s saw the emergence of a new group of black writers producing "a literature aimed at having meaningful political insight and effects" which took as its content contemporary political events and aspirations, while attempting to find a governing aesthetic among African literary models and notions of black collective experience and consciousness (Sole, 1983: 39). In its earliest manifestations this writing took the form of poetry and drama, though in the years following the Soweto Revolt black writers increasingly turned to the medium of realist prose fiction, written in English (Sole, 1988).

This surge of black writing can be seen as performing what Jeremy Cronin has termed a "nationalisation" of the English language and its literary forms and institutions (1985: 26). The broadly realist aesthetic of the new writing develops out of the demands attendant upon its role as ideological work performed on behalf of the emergent urban collectivities that form its public, a role whereby cultural activity forms "part of the thrust by a black intelligentsia to mobilize and unify a black community against the strictures of apartheid and the strength of white culture" (Sole, 1988: 85). This extension of wider political conflicts into the cultural sphere saw

the issue of the relationship between cultural practice and the social order become the subject of urgent debate in South Africa. Following the establishment of structures and institutions promoting a "people's" (or, more recently, "national") culture, considerable attention has been given to the issue of the artist's or writer's responsibility and to related attempts to establish a politicised aesthetic deriving from a broadly materialist view of the social origins and effects of art and writing. The increasing strategic weight acquired by counterhegemonic politics during the period led to a valorisation of the instrumental potentialities of popular, participative and documentary cultural forms. Accordingly, demands for a politically-committed and instrumentalist literary practice began to circulate in the 1970s, specifying the use of a realist literary aesthetic dealing with local and immediate political actuality. Narratives were favoured that retold the story of the political present including what hegemonic accounts had left out or distorted: history was to be written, to use Said's phrase, "from the standpoint of its victims" (Said, 1979).

In such a context the white writing under consideration here finds itself occupying the space of a modernism--elitist, oppositional, the politically and culturally marginal expression of a socially privileged fraction of the population. Like other modernisms before it, it is a cultural expression of "middle-class dissidence" (Sinfield, 1989: 40). But, in spite of its avantgardist appearance, this writing exhibits considerable scepticism about the social function of the writer and about the limited impact of cultural activity in a situation of political crisis. A reason for this insecurity can be found in the fact that the modernist white writing of the period confronts two opposing sets of pressures. On the one hand, the discrediting of the liberal-realist tradition and its association with colonial practices, forms and styles encouraged the

development of alternative forms of writing and describing, new ways of telling stories. This new writing began to give space to a variety of narrative strategies revealing the sleight of hand by which realism constructs the very reality to which it is supposed to bear neutral witness. More generally, the new writing of the 1970s is a differentiated reaction to the realisation that the South African literary tradition that had preceded it--a mode of writing dominated by a liberal aesthetic and its formal realisation in realism--had, whatever its oppositional pretensions, failed to distance itself from the systems of knowledge and representation inherited from colonial practices. The critique of liberalism uncovered the structures of authority which underlie and endorse the realist claim to represent the real. It confirmed the connections between practices of authoritative representation such as realist narrative, and colonialist practices of surveillance, appropriation and control of a subject population. On the other hand, a powerful oppositional discourse arose demanding the use of realism as a weapon in the service of the victims of a form of power that has been shown to resemble realism itself: "a form of narrative in which the productivity and circulation of subjects and signs are bound in a reformed and recognizable totality" (Bhabha, 1986: 154).

While the effect of the disturbance of the West's sovereignty for its intellectuals has been to discredit Enlightenment narratives of legitimation and emancipation (Lyotard's grands récits), in contemporary South Africa variations of the same narratives mobilise resistance to the apartheid system, and direct the ideological strategies of the liberation movements (cf During, 1987). The central material condition of which Western postmodernism can be taken as the symptom, is, in Jameson's theorisation, "a prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm, to the point at which everything in our social life--from economic value and state power, to practices

and to the very structure of the psyche itself--can be said to have become 'cultural' in some original and as yet untheorized sense" (1984: 87). But nothing approaching a comparable acculturation of the political and social realm can be located in the South Africa of the 1970s. On the contrary, a definitive characteristic of the cultural life of this period is its permeation by political demands and obligations, which claim precedence over theorisations of the cultural or linguistic determination of truth and political morality. Modernist white writing is ethically unable, unlike its postmodernist contemporaries, simply to jettison the practices affirmed by anti-colonial struggle: "history, representation, evaluation" (Tiffin, 1988: 171), in the name of a postmodern celebration of "absolute weightlessness, in which anything is imaginatively possible, because nothing really matters" (Connor, 1989: 227). But in spite of its ethical proximity to the cause of liberation, white writing, by virtue of the whiteness that is the mark of its association with indefensible privilege and the status quo, is kept at a distance from the emergent social forces capable of achieving that liberation. In what follows, I will consider the ways in which modernist white writing negotiates this set of opposing impulses.

IV

Returning to the particular social crisis that surfaces in the 1970s and to its effects on the cultural sphere, I will argue that the postliberal white writing of the seventies is a reaction to the erosion of white hegemony, including the limited repertoire of oppositional positions offered by that hegemony. In response to the racial polarisation of the political and cultural sphere, and in the face of the writing-off of the liberal's role as protester and intermediary, the possibility of any ethical adversarial position for

the white intellectual becomes drastically attenuated. During the 1970s, the racial division of South African literature is exacerbated by the repressive interventions of the state on the one hand and the separatism of the Black Consciousness Movement on the other. The white writing of the period finds therefore finds itself occupying the unpromising space described by Nadine Gordimer in her essay "Relevance and commitment" (1979):

The white artist belongs to the white culture that rejected black culture, and is now itself rejected by black culture. He is the non-European whose society nevertheless refused to acknowledge and take root with an indigenous culture. He is the non-Black whom blacks see as set apart from indigenous culture. He does not know as yet whether this is a dead-end or can be made a new beginning. (Gordimer, 1988: 113)

In such a situation of isolation and marginality the white writer is akin to Adorno's "intellectual in emigration", for whom "[t]here is no remedy but steadfast diagnosis of oneself and others, the attempt through awareness, if not to escape doom, at least to rob it of its dreadful violence, that of blindness" (1974: 33). Adorno's attempt to recuperate some sense of the value of individual critical consciousness in the face of the absence of collective praxis is the key to his valorisation of "authentic art" or modernism. Following Neil Lazarus, Adorno's assessment of modernism's capacity to resist the colonising impulses of the "total society" can, with an amount of qualification, be applied to the situation of postliberal white writing in contemporary South Africa (1987: 134).

For Adorno, modernism (specifically, the European High Modernism of Kafka, Beckett, Schönberg) is a form of resistance against the situational contingencies it faced--the growing marginality of intellectual production, and the impending dissolution of bourgeois subjectivity under the corrosive influence of reification (Lazarus, 1987: 137). The formal challenges of modernism, its breaking up of the bland surfaces of conventional artistic and literary form, were

simultaneously a reflection and a refusal of the conditions of the "administered world" of triumphant capitalism: "in telling the truth about the world through their own inner violence, modernist works gave the lie to the world's ideological presentation of itself" (Lazarus, 1987: 139). Moreover, the uncompromising negativity of modernism made it the last refuge of a critical practice resistant to the instrumentalism attending the penetration of the market relation into the cultural sphere and the consequent reconstitution of the cultural as a commodity-producing enterprise--the "culture industry" (Jameson, 1971: 34-5). For Adorno, modernism's alienation from the world of capitalism and any of the social forces defending or contesting it is the key to its capacity for critical consciousness. By articulating its powerlessness, modernism resists the forces that have rendered it powerless: "Even the blossoming tree lies the moment its bloom is seen without the shadow of terror; even the innocent "how lovely!" becomes an excuse for an existence outrageously unlovely, and there is no longer beauty or consolation except in the gaze falling on horror, withstanding it and in unalleviated consciousness of negativity holding fast to the possibility of what is better" (Adorno: 1974: 25). By an analogous process, postliberal white writing, cut off from both white and black culture and interests, grounds itself "in the articulation of negativity, or, more precisely, in the act of saying no to the burgeoning instrumentalism that surrounds it" (Lazarus, 1987: 139).

There are two aspects of Lazarus's argument which I have found to be of interest here. The first is its identification of a distinctive body of recent South African literature as a version of modernism. Following Bürger (1984), the emergence of such categories as modernism and the avant-garde are most productively considered as the products of historical variations in the social functions performed by the institutions of art or literature. Accordingly, Lazarus's

identification is not the result of stylistic analysis of a selection of South African literature (noting the presence or absence of recognisably "Modernist" textual strategies such as self-referentiality, narrative disconnectedness, the valorisation of the ironic or arbitrary), but rather that of a description of the cultural position and social function of a body of literature, and of the historical modifications undergone by "the situation of the writer as critical intellectual in modernity" (1987: 141). The second aspect is Lazarus's account of the positive potentiality of a modernist writing practice in the South African situation that is derived and distinguished from Adorno's valorisation of aesthetic modernism. Adorno's commendation of the resistant or countercultural charge of modernist works is the product of a theoretical concatenation of the aesthetic and political dimensions of the modernist project: as the editors of Aesthetics and Politics point out, "Adorno's essays were not much a Marxist defence of Modernism as the expression of a distinctively modernist Marxism: his positions were, mutatis mutandis, those of modernist ideology itself" (Adorno et al, 1977: 149). Accordingly, in Adornian "autonomous art" there is to be found both the physiognomy of the whole social order and its negation. But a dialectical conception of cultural activity and its products requires that a positive, or utopian element exist correlatively with the negative. The artistic product constitutes an expression of dissatisfaction with the present either on the basis of a metaphysical nostalgia for what is no longer and cannot be, or, on the basis of a sense of what things ought to be, a projected point of resolution of the "stubborn negation" of things as they are now (Jameson, 1971: 111). In its outright hostility to the present, autonomous art acts as a conscience, refusing to let us forget what has been lost and what the present prevents us from regaining: "He over whom Kafka's wheels have passed, has lost for ever both any peace with the world and any

chance of consoling himself with the judgement that the way of the world is bad; the element of ratification which lurks in resigned admission of the dominance of evil is burnt away" (Adorno et al, 1977: 191).

But, having outlined the extent to which South African literary modernism occupies a position comparable to that described by Adorno's account of modernism, it is necessary to stress that the two positions are not homologous. For Adorno the implacable forces of history and totalitarianism reduce the role of human agency to exilic acts of refusal and resistance. It is the particular mark of Adorno's aesthetic that it is formed in a situation where a "total society ... has absorbed the opposing voice", where "all cultural products, even non-conformist ones, have been incorporated into the distribution-mechanisms of large-scale capital" (Adorno, 1974: 212, 207). In such a situation, art is left with no space to operate ethically except in the articulation of negativity:

The Stendhal formula [art as a promesse de bonheur] takes on its power when we stress its constitutive incompleteness: art is not bliss, but rather the latter's promise. The Frankfurt School then rewrite it in their own grimmer idiom: "The secret of aesthetic sublimation is its representation of fulfillment as a broken promise." ... This is, then, one crucial thematic differentiation between "genuine art" and that offered by the Culture Industry: both raise the issue and the possibility of happiness in their very being, as it were, and neither provides it; but where the one keeps faith with it by negation and suffering, through the enactment of its impossibility, the other assures us it is taking place (Jameson, 1990: 147)

It is such a situation that governs Adorno's rejection of Sartre's attempt to restore the possibility of meaningful adversarial agency to writers and their products by arguing for the necessity of a littérature engagée.

Contemporary white writing or "South African modernism" differs from Adorno's version of modernism, argues Lazarus, precisely in that, by virtue of its historical situation, it is able to retain a degree

of faith in the future: "where Adorno was writing under the sign of the supposed 'miscarrying' of the revolution, the situation in which the South African intellectuals write ... is a pre-revolutionary one" (1987: 146). The particular series of pressures that the contemporary South African situation brings to bear upon the white writer is thus distinguishable from that of Adorno's modernists, since "very much alive in South Africa, there is in existence precisely what had been absent in Adorno's Europe: a militant, self-possessed, disciplined, increasingly powerful force for revolutionary change--the black working class, 'the masses', 'the people'" (1987: 145). In such a situation, the responsibility facing the white intellectual is not that of a negation of totality, but rather the project of the negotiation of the interim. "Clear-sighted enough to see that the Adornian labour of speaking for the world against the world cannot be undertaken," Lazarus claims, "today's white South African writers instead confirm their own marginality in the explicit recognition that to the extent that their writings are representative, they are representative of enlightened white opposition to apartheid, no more and no less" (1987: 145). Caught up in the implacable Manicheism created by a colonial society seemingly ready to defend itself to the death, white writers turn to the examination of their own paralysis, their inability to detach themselves from the old order and find a home in the new. In the face of the essentialism of racial differentiation, the erasure of difference in the name of discrimination, the white writing of the seventies finds itself engaged in the resistant project of dissecting its own ineffectivity, its inability to make a difference.

V

The ethical terms with which the situation of the white writer has been marked out here make it clear that, in a context where the presence of a wider social crisis is visible and unignorable, the activity of literary writing cannot consider itself exempt from political obligation. Writing is called to account for what it does and does not do to uphold or oppose an intolerable status quo. As Sartre demonstrated in What is Literature? (1948), in a situation of social crisis the same "gratuitousness" that makes an artistic product "the image of freedom" begins to look like an indefensible luxury (1967: 173). The principled aloofness from market popularity and commodity production cultivated by the higher reaches of literary culture comes to seem like a form of parasitism: "An author shot is one less mouth to feed. The least important producer would be a greater loss to the nation" (Sartre, 1967: 172). In such a situation the activity of writing is tainted by guilt and the writer is confronted with the question--why write?

Sartre's answer takes the form of an attempt to find a realm of effective and responsible action for writing in order to ward off charges of its uselessness in a situation of crisis. The essence of Sartre's "guilty aestheticism"⁸ is a theorisation of the instrumental capacities of writing to further the aims of politics. The guilt of art, the otiose luxury of artistic production, is offset by claims of its political effectivity and its sympathies with the oppressed. Sartre called for writers to withdraw from their long and comfortable alliance with the bourgeois classes and instead commit their writing towards the class of the future: the proletariat. Though such a commitment may entail sacrificing certain comfortably-established literary practices and assumptions, this reorientation of writing is necessitated by the culpable inauthenticity of a writing practice that

does not admit the guilt of class society. Equally inauthentic is writing that does not commit itself both to the overthrow of that society, and to the class capable of achieving universal freedom. The sacrifices entailed by commitment are thus compelled, for Sartre, by the ethical necessity of avoiding the self-deception and guilt entailed in a bourgeois writing practice, alienated by its association with a doomed class from the only other class that could end that alienation. Writing has a responsibility to enable its readers to imagine a form of society in which we are free because others are free. To ignore that responsibility is to ignore the essential purpose of writing and to fail to utilise the potential for freedom that lay within certain forms of writing.* Silence on the subject of freedom is an inauthentic act which furthers the oppressive status quo because it says nothing against it: "I hold Flaubert and Goncourt responsible for the repression which followed the Commune because they did not write one line to prevent it"⁷.

From this summary account, Sartre's theory of commitment may seem to confront exigencies rather remote from those of this study. However, a more precise situation of the theory in the historical and national context in which it arises helps to account for the urgency with which the issue of artistic commitment comes to be dominate the politics of culture in the South Africa of the 1970s and 1980s. Raymond Williams has argued that the concept of commitment is most productively examined historically and comparatively: "the first way to look at the idea of commitment is not as at some general notion about which we can at once argue, citing this or that historical case, but rather to see why the notion of commitment was developed and against what alternative ideas it was directed" (1989: 77). What such a historicisation achieves is not so much a recounting of the adventures of the concept of commitment, as a description of its

functionality, how it is called into play in response to the pressures of a particular situation.

For Sartre, the Second World War had irremediably discredited the French bourgeoisie, which had not only accommodated the Nazi occupation but had colluded with it to further its own anticommunist political ends. Consequently, any affiliation of the writer with this declining and venal class was not only an act of bad faith, but politically ineffective (Sinfield, 1989: 86). Writers would act in their own best interests, Sartre argued, by committing themselves to furthering the goal of a classless society and to the class that can bring about that society. This is because the achievement of such a society would make meaningless the signals which restrict a literary work to a particular class or racial fraction and which allow it to be read by that "public" as addressed to itself and no other, thereby implicitly justifying or maintaining the violence of class or racial conflict (Jameson, 1988: 68). Sartre's adversary in the considerable task of disassociating literary writing from bourgeois culture is literary French itself, its history having left it contaminated by all the flatulent signs of privilege: "a language which a hundred and fifty years of bourgeois domination have broken, vulgarized, slackened and stuffed with "bourgeoisisms", each of which seems a little sigh of ease and abandon" (1967: 123). With such tainted raw material a writer's gesture of commitment is necessary to offset the associations of a literary product with luxury. Notably then, it is only a specific form of writing, clear enough to permit reality and situation to be visible through it, which will fulfil the demands of responsibility. Poetry thus cannot redeem itself by means of commitment: "Perception through prose is immaculate, and praxis is close at hand ... Poetry, by marked contrast, passes rough panes of glass between man and the sun of truth in the world ..." (La Capra, 1978: 72). The air of privacy and self-absorption attaching to such

forms as poetry and the poeticised prose forms of the avant-garde, restricts them to elite, specialised consumption. For Sartre, a writing practice exclusively concerned with internal, aesthetic rebellion, puts itself out of reach of the agencies of real rebellion in the world, thereby condemning itself to social inutility.

While Sartre theorised that commitment and affiliation to the proletariat was essential to ethical intellectual activity, his own fulfilment of this prescription was frustrated by his distance from the principal organisational representative and affiliative structure to which he would otherwise have been directed--the French Communist Party. Instead Sartre found himself caught in a narrow zone of non-alignment between, on the one hand, the Stalinism and the Zhdanovite commissars of the Party and, on the other, the guilt-ridden freedoms of the bourgeois culture he had rejected: "But we others, though we have nothing to mediate at present, are none the less in the position of mediators. Pulled from both sides, we are condemned to suffer this double exigence as a Passion" (1967: 205). Seen in this light, Sartre's defence of the salvational capacity of writing seems like an attempt to reconcile the contradictory pressures placed upon him by his historical situation. Though as a writer he was cut adrift from affiliation to either his public of origin or choice, this could be compensated for by his theorisation of the particular power of writing to exemplify the condition of freedom. The status of committed literature as the embodiment of the promise of freedom and the engagement of that writing with the concrete struggles of the working classes, meant that isolated, private acts of reading and writing could become quintessentially social acts: for Sartre "[committed] literature was now a 'conducting wire' leading to socialist democracy" (Aronson, 1980: 142).

Faced with the guilt of writing and the marginality of intellectual production in conditions of conflict, privation and

crisis, Sartre was able to defend the social utility of the activity of writing. Similarly in South Africa, a demand began to circulate that writers justify their activity in a time of need by deploying the instrumental potentialities of their work and recognising the primacy of the political over the aesthetic. This demand originates from the cultural revival encouraged and directed by the organisations of Black Consciousness during the 1970s, and is taken up with minimal variation by succeeding nonracial organisations during the 1980s (Sole, 1983: 67). Occupying an ethical and political position analogous to Sartre's "proletariat" in the South African version of commitment are the rising classes of the disenfranchised and exploited, while occupying the position of Sartre's "bourgeoisie" is the white ruling fraction. Accordingly, the demand that writers commit themselves to the legitimate cause of the people entails disassociating themselves from the white order and from its institutions and adherents.

But, for the white writer of the 1970s, the emergence of a social agency capable of transforming the society that gave rise to it, mobilised by a version of nationalism privileging blackness as its central principle, makes at once necessary and impossible the injunction to white writers to write for the group which could free them.⁸ Faced with the choice between further affiliation to a declining white order and rejection by the emerging class of the future, white writers found themselves in an unattached and unfixed place. Thus, in Nadine Gordimer's Burger's Daughter (1979), Rosa Burger registers the confutation by Soweto's schoolchildren of her father's Leninist theorisation of the intellectual's duty to bring to the consciousness of the oppressed their own political potential: "They seem to know what is to be done" (348). This experience of superfluity informs much of the white writing of the period, generating a critical revision of liberal-humanist conceptions of the social function of literary writing and its participation in the

world. Equally however, the Sartrean relocation of writing in a position where it is at once necessary and secondary to social struggles cannot be unproblematically taken up in a society so "deeply and calculatedly compartmentalised" that "the writer's potential has unscalable limitations" (Gordimer, 1973a: 52).

Sartre's dismissal of atelic and self-absorbed Modernist works in favour of a form of writing that is accessible and concerned with the concrete returns us to the question of the ethics of form. For Sartre, it was necessary to avert the tendencies of literary writing towards style, personal utterance and private language in order to deflect the association of the literary product with a discredited bourgeois individualism. Similarly in contemporary South Africa, a politicised aesthetic requires the suppression of the "literary" attributes of writing in favour of an engagement with social reality. Commitment demands a writing practice that is concerned with the here and the now in a form unobscured by the signs of textuality. As liberal literary culture comes to be stigmatised by its colonial origins and its failed politics, writing that continues to show signs of its affiliation or preoccupation with the institutions of literature is disposed of as elitist, conservative and, in the end, white:

It is, I think symptomatic of Coetzee's liberal petty bourgeois class position and self-identification that his fiction reveals an enormous preoccupation with problems of consciousness, with exemplifying the experience of a crisis of consciousness. Symptomatic, in that Coetzee indicates in this way his critical alienation from the dominant interests in Western society, and at the same time his inability to make a material change of role, of identity, on the basis of this critical awareness: he remains 'a part of the system'. ... As a consequence of the prominence given to a state of agonised consciousness, material factors of oppression and struggle in contemporary South Africa receive a subordinate attention. (Vaughan, 1982: 136-7)

A productive formulation by Gordimer in her essay "The essential gesture" (first published in 1984) indicates the degree to which the

issue of form and the issue of commitment are linked. Following a description of the racial division of literature in contemporary South Africa, Gordimer asks: "To whom are South African [white] writers answerable in their essential gesture if they are not in the historical and existential situation of blacks, and if (axiomatic for them in varying degrees) they are alienated from their 'own', the historical and existential situation of whites?" (1988: 245).

Gordimer's uses a term drawn from Barthes's Writing Degree Zero (1953), "the writer's ... essential gesture as a social being" (Barthes 1967: 10). As glossed by Gordimer, the term sets out the dialectical relationship that exists between the writer as an individual engaged in the isolated act of writing and the quintessentially social material of language: "Created in the common lot of language, that essential gesture is individual; and with it the writer quits the commune of the corpus; but with it he enters the commonalty of society, the world of other beings who are not writers" (1988: 245). The word "commonalty" touches upon the question of the guilt of literary writing in a class society that is the problematic of Barthes's book (Jameson, 1988: 68). The isolation and privacy required to write entails not only the isolation of the writer from the mass of "other beings", but also, in a society where privacy is equated with luxury, writing comes to be associated with the class and racial privilege that enables it. Accordingly, writing is dissociated from the social realm where it originates, instead occupying a realm of the specialised and privatised consumption of cultural products.

Gordimer adverts here to the mutation of writing into what Barthes terms "Literature". According to Barthes, the more or less open class warfare that begins in France with the revolution of June 1848 results in a growing ideological distance between the writer and the bourgeois reading public. This isolation, combined with the material distance of the writer from the rising proletariat, results

in a shift in the fundamental problematic of writing from that of communication (or content) to that of language (or form), creating "a set of signs unrelated to the ideas, the language or the style, and setting out to give definition, within the body of every possible mode of expression, to the utter separateness of a ritual language"

(Barthes, 1967: 2). The institutions and discourses of Literature function to relegate writing to the harmless confines of the artistic: "society stamps upon [the writer] the unmistakable signs of art so as to draw him along the more inescapably in its own process of alienation" (Barthes, 1967: 40). The ethical question that confronts the writer in the face of this process can be said to be a matter of form: "as soon as the writer ceased to be a witness to the universal, to become the incarnation of a tragic awareness (around 1850), his first gesture was to choose the commitment of his form, either by adopting or rejecting the writing of his past" (Barthes, 1967).

According to Gordimer, the same question of the commitment of form confronts the writer in South Africa: "The [writer] ... has still to decide whether ... he can fulfil his essential gesture to society only by ready-packaging his creativity to the dimensions of a social realism those who will free him of his situation have the authority to ask of him, or whether he may be able to do so by work George Steiner defines as 'scrupulously argued, not declaimed ... informed, at each node and articulation of proposal, with a just sense of the complex, contradictory nature of historical evidence'" (Gordimer, 1988: 246-7, emphasis original). While one need not necessarily accept Gordimer's specification of the alternatives available to the white writer (set out, significantly, in the terms of Lukács's distinction between "socialist" and "critical" realism), this formulation demonstrates the crucial significance of the form taken by the writer's "essential gesture", the question of the responsibility of form: for whom are we writing? by whom can we be understood? what is the use of our writing?

VI

The particular parameters occupied by the controversies relating to artistic responsibility and to attempts to establish a politicised aesthetic deriving from a broadly materialist view of the social origins and effects of art and writing--controversies that so dominate the cultural scene of the present day--are set in place by the cultural and political events of the 1970s. Moreover, as I have attempted to show, the opposing positions taken up over these issues are formulated in terms and categories comparable to those employed in the debates within French literary culture after the Second World War, pre-eminently associated with Sartre's argument for the necessity of founding a "littérature engagée". Equally, in the context of attempts to formulate a politicised aesthetic which would be appropriate to the demands of the present conjuncture, one can note what seems to be a reissuing of the Realism versus Modernism controversy that developed within and beyond the Frankfurt School from the 1930s to the 1950s.

The value of making such comparisons is, I would argue, that they are able to provide a sense of the context and setting in which "the politics of interpretation and the politics of culture are enacted" (Said, 1983: 141). Given that, as Said has noted, "ideas and theories travel--from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another", it is then productive to examine "whether a theory in one historical period and national culture becomes altogether different for another period or situation" (1983: 226). In such an examination, ideas and theories come to be seen as called into play in response to the shaping of period and situation; their appearance and subsequent disappearance from view in one context, their turning up in another, serve to destabilise the seeming fixity and universality of theories and to raise the question of "the relationship between theory

and criticism, on the one hand, and society and culture on the other" (Said, 1983: 230).

It is thus interesting to note the centrality to this study of a term which, though common to both the post-War France of Sartre and to contemporary South Africa, did not travel from one to other, instead originating in each situation with a set of associations quite specific to its context: "white writing". In both situations, the relationship between writing and the immediate historical present comes to be seen as oppositional. Writing and politics are seen as contending categories. The pressures of this contention in each situation gives rise to two reconciliations, which can be compared and distinguished by the associations they impart to the term "white writing". For Sartre, a mode of compensation for the discounting of the value of writing in a situation of political crisis lay in an acknowledgement of the instrumental capacities of writing to further the aims of politics. The guilt of art, the otiose luxury of artistic production, is offset by claims of its political effectivity or its sympathies with the oppressed. But this is a fragile reconciliation, at times requiring that writing acquiesce to the greater effectivity of militancy to bring about change in the world. Barthes, setting out from Sartre's position, theorizes a "white writing" which is a way of continuing to write without guilt in an intolerable situation, a mode of writing that does not look like writing: a "zero degree", "colourless" or "neutral" form that negotiates between the demands of responsibility and the demands of writing. In contemporary South Africa, by contrast, "white writing" is an reductionist categorisation which turns writing inside-out, into an allegory of the racial origins of its writing. In the earlier situation, "white writing" appears as a reconciliation of the conflicting demands made upon it by its situation. In the later, it is a situation in the face of which a reconciliation must be found.

Describing the innovative style of Camus's L'Étranger (1942), Sartre noted its exemplary clarity, serving to efface almost completely the signs of the writer and the obstructions of form: "consciousness [conscience] is interposed, a pure transparency [translucidité], a pure passivity which registers all facts" (Sartre, 1943: 115). The broad terms of this description were adopted by Barthes in order to define a mode of writing between Literature and the World. According to Barthes, L'Étranger inaugurates "une écriture blanche" (1953: 111, 1967: 78), a "transparent form of speech ... a style of absence which is almost an ideal absence of style; ... a sort of negative mood in which the social or mythical characters of a language are abolished in favour of a neutral and inert state of form" (1967: 77). In both Barthes's and Sartre's case the pared-down style of Camus's novel functions as the strategic solution to the problem of the ethics of writing in the midst of an intolerable situation.

For Sartre, Camus's mode of writing in L'Étranger appears as the solution to the contradiction between the self-effacing demands of clarity and communicability and the individuated vision of the world that constitutes writing. While one is able to see through the transparency of Camus's writing to the absurdities of alienated existence, it is nevertheless only through the narration of those absurdities that one is able to see the alien reality of the world. Camus's writing is, both solid and transparent, giving what Sartre terms a "substructure" to the narrated events. Accordingly, rather than a mere symptom of absurdity, the novel in fact both distances itself from and resists the absurdity it narrates: it is "a work of order, written about the absurd [composée à propos de l'absurde] and against the absurd" (Sartre, 1943: 121). Camus's skill thus lies at once in his recreation of reality and his concealment of that recreation. What is left for the writer in such an aesthetic is the

responsibility to conceal as creatively as possible the signs of creation.

But, at times, the overbearing pressures of a writer's situation overpower the capacity of even the most committed writing to ameliorate it. War is an occasion saturated with the need for direct and visible commitment: "When the enemy is separated from you by a barrier of fire, you have to judge him as a whole [en bloc], as the incarnation of evil; all war is a form of Manicheism" (Sartre, 1967: 53, 1947: 120). In such a situation the need for commitment at times exceeds the possibilities of writing. It is at such moments that writing must be abandoned in favour of more direct forms of action, failing which, the gratuity of literary writing, the ethical distance from commodity production it attempts to maintain, will become a form of parasitism: "An author shot is one less mouth to feed. The least important producer would be a greater loss to the nation" (Sartre, 1967: 172). Similarly, another "form of Manicheism" at which the project of liberation by means of literature falters is the colonial situation. It was in the face of this precise situation that Sartre was to abandon his own literary writing in favour of directly political writing and other acts of solidarity with the decolonisation struggles being fought in the Third World (Aronson, 1980: 158-9): "This is the end of the dialectic; you condemn this war but do not yet dare to declare yourselves to be on the side of the Algerian fighters; never fear, you can count on the settlers and the hired soldiers; they'll make you take the plunge" (Sartre, 1963: 26).

Similarly, Barthes's Writing Degree Zero (the two sections of which were first published in essay form in Camus's journal Combat in 1947 and 1950) can be read as set out in terms of the problematic of the demands of situation upon writing. Barthes's book should, like Sartre's, be placed within the context out of which both arise: that of the guilt of writing and the marginality of intellectual production

in conditions of conflict, privation and political crisis.* But in contrast to Sartre, Barthes's response is formal, textual, remaining within the realm of writing itself. We saw that for Sartre the language of literature was replete with "bourgeoisisms", the signs of an affiliation to one class or social fraction and the consequent marginalisation of the others. To employ literary forms, then, was for writing to associate itself with the fallen world of class-division, limitation and fracture. Barthes proposed the use of a mode of writing which would have the same effect as Sartre's Utopia (the unification of "real" and "virtual" publics) yet could do so within writing itself, obviating the need for the extra-literary commitments required by Sartre's program. The solution was found in a practice of reduced literariness, a "zero-degree", neutral, colourless writing. To write could be ethical, but only if one wrote in a certain way:

Barthes ... ingeniously imagined a rather different way of escaping from "the nightmare of history," namely the projection of a kind of writing from which all group and class signals had been eliminated: white or bleached writing, the practice of a kind of Utopian neutrality, which would enable an escape on this side ... from the collective guilt inherent in the practice of any of the literary signs as such. Ironically, the whitest writing always slowly turned into a literary institution and a practice of literary signs in its own right, over time: Barthes contemporaneous example, Camus, no longer looks very neutral to us today, nor do the later practitioners of the then nouveau roman. (Jameson, 1988: 68)

Thus the Utopian desire for a mode of writing beyond class and politics, beyond History, is sabotaged by the ineluctable situation of writing in the world. What both creates the desire for, and prevents the realisation of, both Sartre's attempted reconciliation of writing and solidarity and Barthes's realm of neutrality within writing is the existence of historical situations which threaten to silence writing altogether. Such a situation is that of colonisation. The work of Camus is implicated in the French colonial adventure in Algeria to which he is the unwilling, but by no means neutral, witness. Once

that context is restored, Camus's position appears as that of the marginalised intellectual in the face of the nightmare of a colonial history, the seemingly irresolvable situational paradox of a moral man in an immoral situation (Said, 1990: 87). Camus comes to be read as a representative of that marginal and unhappy figure, described by Albert Memmi as the "colonizer who refuses", his political sympathies towards the colonised rendered nugatory by the iron logic of the colonial apparatus which implacably returns him to the very section of society he wishes to be distanced from: "There are, I believe, impossible historical situations and this is one of them" (Memmi, 1965: 39). What is generated by this restoration of a colonial history and situation is a reading of Camus as a unwilling colonizer, behind whose "neutral and inert" sentences is found the ideological consciousness of his situation, the almost casual habits of thought and orientation of a European in a colonial setting which were to come to the surface in his notorious declaration of de facto support for the French "pacification" of the Algerian national struggle (Thody, 1989: 8-9), his denial of Algerian claims to nationhood (Said, 1990: 91). This is a reading against the grain of the canonical metropolitan reception of Camus's work (as a dramatisation of essential and universal existential preoccupations, the ultimate subject of his writing as *la condition humaine*) (Said, 1990: 92), and, indeed, against that of Barthes's approval of Camus's mode of prising his writing loose from the determinations and judgement of History.

In the process outlined above, the dynamics of the colonial situation overpower any compensatory capacity which private, uncommitted acts may have had in other situations; a style seemingly neutral, cleansed of the signs of writing as privilege or as private utterance, is read as the product of a consciousness which is uncommitted and hence complicit with colonialism. In such a situation, the contradiction between writing and militancy seems

irreconcilable: the demands of militancy overpower those of writing, writing becomes the subordinated term of a violent hierarchy. It is worth setting out a brief description of the ideal-type of the colonial situation within which the private realm of writing can find no space to exist ethically.

The colonial social formation is one where relationships of oppression and domination are on the surface, signalled by the blunt fact of racial difference: "When you examine at close quarters the colonial context it is evident that what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given species" (Fanon, 1967: 30-1). It is a situation where race is the fetishised and indelible mark of privilege or of oppression. The coloniser who wishes to resist this racial disposition can only demonstrate that resistance by an act of commitment visible enough to cancel out the implications of his or her race. It is only in acts of manifest commitment to the cause to which they are ethically directed that any of the systemic detractions of the colonial structure are avoided. Accordingly, in such a situation commitment necessarily entails sacrifice: "The European who has been tortured has behaved like an authentic militant in the national fight for independence" (Fanon, 1965: 151). The alternative--to attempt to occupy a space between the metropolitan power and the nationalist--entails only marginalisation: "it can be said of Algeria's European democrats what has been endlessly repeated of the French parties of the Left: for a long time history is made without them (Fanon, 1965: 149).

VII

Fanon's description of the visible stratification of colonial society grounded upon the inerasable physical marker of race returns us to the similarly balkanised social territory of contemporary South Africa:

When one crosses the mountains separating the Atlantic Ocean from the Indian Ocean, by the Old Cape Road, one arrives at a vantage point above the Silvermine Southern Atlantic Naval Headquarters (largely sunk into the mountain) from where one can look down upon the maze of Pollemoor Prison Command: Maximum Security--stark and inaccessible, with its watertower where pigeons nest; Medium--an agglomeration of bungalows enclosed by two fences of wire netting; the white Male prison; the Women's Prison; the dog compound; the general stores and the workshops; the administrative block; the staff accomodation; the acres of carrots and cabbages and the Boere's playing fields; the watchtowers; the encircling wall ...

South Africa in a nutshell. With all the demarcations and barriers afflicting that totalitarian society--racial, sexual, the hierarchy of rulers and subjects. (Breytenbach, 1986: 213, ellipsis in original)

Breytenbach's image of a carceral network of rulers and ruled gives appropriate weight and intractability to the colonial problematic that so taxes white writing and intellectual production during this period. It is the visibility of racial differentiation and inequality, the translation of the racial principles that order South Africa politically and economically into the disposition of people in space, that frustrates attempts by white writers to disassociate themselves and their work from white power and privilege. The revisionist writing of the 1970s can be analysed as grounded upon the attempt to find solutions to the problematic imposed by the ongoing coloniality of South African society in the face of mounting anti-colonial pressures.

In his influential account of the new writing of the 1970s, Michael Vaughan states that although twentieth-century South African fiction in English has been dominated by a liberal aesthetic, "[t]here are signs that this dominance is now on the wane" (1982b: 119). Two distinct aesthetic tendencies emerge in the 1970s as contenders for liberalism's paramountcy. The first of these Vaughan describes as "modernism", the second "populist realism" (1982b: 118). The modernist aesthetic modifications succeeding liberal-realism are, with a measure of qualification, ascribed to white writers. Vaughan

dismisses Coetzee's fiction as paying "privileged attention to the predicament of a liberal petty bourgeois intelligentsia" (1982b: 137). Moreover, he maintains, it is without "scope for collaborative interaction with other work, of different racial-social origin" (1982b: 134). This criticism can, given the long history of congruity between race and class in South Africa, be decoded as an attempt to deracialise the terms of ascription of the new writing to its writers, while nevertheless conceding that a racial division exists in postliberal literature. Thus Coetzee and the white modernists write a fiction expressing the "agonised duality" experienced by intellectuals unable to disassociate themselves categorically from a system they reject (Vaughan, 1982b: 137). Meanwhile "populist" writing turns out to be as much of a product of the alienated petty-bourgeoisie as its modernist contemporary, the expression "of a petty-bourgeois culture that is by no means equivalent to a popular literature" (Vaughan, 1982b: 137).

It is Vaughan's discomfort with the close articulation of writing and race that is of interest here. Vaughan regrets that the new writing is unable to relinquish its obsession with race in order to connect with the real conditions responsible for the present predicament of South African society. According to Vaughan, the "implication of both Coetzee's novels and Matshoba's stories is that oppression in South Africa derives its essential impulse from the imperative towards racial domination, rather than from a system of class-economic exploitation. The result of this is that their projects make no real connection with forms of class struggle grounded specifically in modern industrial conditions". This omission leads both writers to a "relative neglect of social criticism" in their work (1982b: 136). Vaughan's critical strategy, drawn from general revisionist scholarship, entails the location in the literature of the period of ideologically-conditioned errors relating to the description

of the socio-historical situation in South Africa. This allows him to question the relation of the literary work to truth, and to expose it as inadequate or dissembling in its relation to the ethically-necessary task of "social criticism". Such criticism would involve the fictional embodiment of a theoretically-informed analysis of South African society, akin to Lukács's "correct understanding of reality" that is the hallmark of socially-useful literature (1963: 100). Arguably more productive than Vaughan's corrective interpretation, is a recognition of Coetzee's and Matshoba's focus upon racial matters (and, equally, of Vaughan's impatience with it) as a reflex of the effective socio-cultural ambience of the period. This would recognise that the "imperative towards racial domination", or what I have described as the coloniality of the South African situation, rather than constituting a unhealthy fixation of the regrettable ideological consciousness of its writers, constitutes the central problematic producing and inhibiting the writing of the 1970s.

In the opening chapter, I will trace some of the material underpinnings of both the perceived coloniality of the South African situation and the perception that this coloniality was rapidly occasioning a fundamental social crisis. In the face of this crisis, white intellectuals and writers sought ways to decolonise themselves and their work. In the succeeding chapters I will examine some of the resultant revisions of South African intellectual and literary practice.

ONE

I

The first of the delimitations of the general field of South African literature I outlined in the introduction--that of historical period--is largely uncontroversial. The years after 1970 inaugurate a distinct and significant phase in South African history. The decade sees a process, unprecedented in its intensity, of politicisation, mobilisation, insurrection and of a counter-process of repression, attempted co-optation and reform. By the end of the decade there existed a state of overt crisis of all levels of the social formation--economic, political, ideological--a state of crisis which placed the survival and future of the entire racial-capitalist order into doubt (Saul & Gelb: 1986).¹⁰

The most visible economic and political manifestations of this crisis are well documented and can be abbreviatively noted. Broadly, there are two interrelated components to the crisis which struck the South African state during the 1970s and which directed responses to it: critical internal economic instability, and a massive increase in the level and effectiveness of mass-based resistance to apartheid (Lodge, 1983: 321-62; Stadler, 1987: 161-184). After almost two decades of growth since the Second World War the domestic economy entered a period of sustained decline, the effects of which began to be felt in the early 1970s (Stadler, 1987: 1). Massive industrial expansion enabled by high levels of foreign investment in the 1960s meant that South African industry required for its continued growth far larger and more lucrative markets than the domestic economy could provide. In order to compete in an export market South African

manufactured products would require increased labour productivity, which in turn required a more skilled and productive workforce, which the white population was numerically incapable of supplying. The social implications of this requirement for economic growth were considerable, marking "a decisive shift away from the reliance on cheap, unskilled migrant labour so long characteristic of South African industry, towards the consolidation of a stable, semi-skilled workforce" (O'Meara, 1982: 3). Such a workforce required better wages than those provided by existing wage levels, in order to reward training and provide incentives for productivity. The implications of raising black wages and levels of skill and productivity would be the creation of a larger internal market, coupled with the potential for an advanced degree of political and economic instability (increased capital intensity leading to increased unemployment, the political repercussions of black workers competing with the politically powerful white workforce). Nevertheless, the impulse towards intensified productivity within the economy led to the calls from certain sectors of the business community both internally and internationally for pragmatic, reformist measures to alleviate the skills shortage and to remove internal barriers on the economy (Lodge, 1983: 326).

The social struggles of the late 1960s and 1970s gave direction and momentum to a body of revisionist and radical literature in the fields of history, anthropology and political economy. The revisionist movement developed initially among expatriate South African academics in Britain and the United States in the wake of the countercultural movements and "new left" revival of the late 1960s (Bozzoli & Delius, 1990: 22). The central object of critique of this literature was the liberal-modernist theorisation of the relationship between the South African state and economy, which held that the racial superstructure operates in contradiction to the rational, modernising tendencies of the capitalist economy (Wolpe, 1988: 26).

The central tenets of the radical counter-position are well known: apartheid is not merely a mechanism for the irrational perpetuation of white domination, but a complex articulation of ideology, racial political practice and the economic system, an "instrument of class rule in a specific form of capitalist society" (Wolpe 1972, 429). The system of apartheid, in its developed form guaranteed and perpetuated by a massive legal-repressive machinery and a structured complex of ideological apparatuses, is the product of a close alliance between the state and capital. Yet the sustained crisis of the 1970s and 1980s allowed liberal-modernist theory at least a certain impressionistic descriptive accuracy and a degree of influence upon state strategy during the period. By the early 1970s what had formerly been a productive interrelationship--between the apartheid system and capitalist growth--was increasingly becoming a barrier to the further growth of the economy (Gelb, 1990). During this period the long-standing co-operation between the state and its capitalist allies as well as alliances within the ruling party began to come under considerable strain as ideological differences erupted over appropriate economic and political responses to the crisis (O'Meara, 1982: 5-6). This growing divergence of interest between the racial and capitalist features of the social formation is of great significance both to the forces seeking to maintain or reform the present order and those seeking its replacement:

in contemporary South Africa, for certain white class fractions, the maintenance of capitalism has become detachable from the maintenance of white domination. Provided that is, that this can be effected without endangering the reproduction of a reformed capitalist order. In this situation, the argument that white domination is a necessary and inescapable condition of the survival of capitalism, begins to be put in question. (Wolpe, 1988: 27)

Reformist attempts at a correction of incipient economic stagnation were unable to prevent the recession which commenced in the

early years of the decade. The recession occasioned a rise in unemployment and a sharp upswing in the inflation rate, while a serious balance-of-payment deficit became evident (Marks & Trapido, 1988: 19). The inevitable social effects of economic deterioration--unemployment, inflation, recession, rural impoverishment and consequent urbanisation, the dwindling of economic possibility--portended an unprecedented intensification of political conflict in the country (Stadler, 1987: 1). In response to signs of structural strain in the edifice of apartheid society the state increased, modernised and refined its already considerable coercive and repressive powers. In opposition to this tendency the period saw a dramatic increase in the scale, momentum and effectiveness of mass-based internal political resistance, an increase that both reflects the existence of a deep structural crisis and which is itself a substantial component of that crisis (Lodge, 1983: 321).

The political effects of the economic crisis were therefore considerable. The period saw a transformation of the intensity and content of political conflict, new social forces entering that conflict, and a definitive end to the near-decade of political quiescence that had followed Sharpeville. But the social antagonisms and structural contradictions that made their appearance in South Africa during the 1970s, had been programmed into the social formation well in advance. The processes of industrialisation and urbanisation, particularly after the Second World War, had given shape to dynamic new social forces. The destruction of pre-capitalist modes of culture and economy by the penetration of market forces and the interventions of the state set off a series of uneven transitions. Segregationist policies left the subsistence economies of the reserves intact, in order to offset the cost of the reproduction of labour power and the necessity for the creation of political and social infrastructures in the urban areas. The system of labour regulation was intended to

permit the existence of the urban labour force necessary for economic growth, with none of the attendant political and social costs. But the central contradiction of this policy was that the proletarianisation it at once promoted and denied undermined the social and economic systems in the reserves, thereby eroding the ability of the reserves both to subsidise the costs of labour and to deflect the political aspirations of the rising proletariat (Wolpe, 1972; Stadler, 1987: 89). By the 1970s the growing unviability of the reserve economies and the labour needs of a massively expanded industrial sector had led to the establishment of a permanent urban proletariat, whose political aspirations lay not in some impoverished rural backwater but in the cities and in the modern economy.

The 1970s thus saw the rise to political self-consciousness of an urban working class, as well as the related social forces with which that working class existed in a complex symbiosis: an increasingly substantial petty-bourgeoisie and a largely déclassé population of students, scholars and unemployed youth. Competing among these groups to fill the gap created by the destruction of the systems of self-identification and aspiration that had been provided by older social forms were the two ideologies and forms of organisation that were to have a definitive impact upon the political scene: the cultural nationalism of the Black Consciousness Movement and the socialism of a burgeoning trade union movement.

Two central events of the decade, the strike wave of 1972-1976 and the Soweto Revolt of 1976, made visible the extent of these economic and political developments. Following the Durban dockworker strikes of 1972 and abating only in the aftermath of the Revolt, over 200 000 black workers were involved in "the most extensive strike wave since the early days of the second world war, [affecting] most of the major urban centres" (Hirson, 1979: 133). Perhaps the most significant consequence of the strikes was the considerable

advancement of the fortunes of a militant trade union movement. Coming as they did after nearly a decade of the absence of any significant worker organisation and activity, the effect of the strike wave upon the economic and political scene has been suggestively described, using Rosa Luxemburg's phrase, as "a complete revolution in miniature" (Saul & Gelb, 1986: 160). While the degree of overlap between the economic and political components of the resistance struggles of the period is difficult to chart, some of the momentum of the labour movement and the forms of organization and consciousness it developed spilled over from working-class struggles into community struggles, contributing to the political climate which precipitated and sustained the Revolt (Hirson, 1979: 282-307). The rise of Black Consciousness and its rapid deployment among emergent urban elites is an indication of the failure of the apartheid system to deliver sufficient material advancement or credible ideological positioning to reconcile the new social forces it had created to their domination. The divisions in the black population that the apartheid system had attempted to create by mobilising ethnic ideologies and fostering an emergent black middle class and bureaucratic elite were bypassed by the single, visible connecting factor of blackness. The danger to the status quo of an economic revolution deriving impetus and appeal beyond the ranks of the working class from nationalist grievances became abundantly clear: "Our money from the townships takes a one-way journey to white shops and white banks, and all we do in our lives is pay the white man either with labour or in coin. Capitalistic exploitative tendencies, coupled with the overt arrogance of white racism have conspired against us" (Biko, 1979: 96).

In effect then, the economic crisis had come to be supplemented by a crisis of white ideological hegemony. As the decade unfolded the costs of attempting to maintain political and economic domination without hegemony were to become clear to the state, the economic

sector and to the forces challenging both. These factors are of particular importance to understanding the increasing centrality during the period of the issue of hegemony and the cultural events and initiatives of the period.

II

An additional geopolitical and military crisis unfolded during the early 1970s, a direct result of the decolonisation struggles being fought elsewhere in the Southern African region. The collapse of the colonial regimes in Angola and Mozambique in 1974 posed a considerable threat to the military stability of South Africa and to the regional balance of power.¹¹ The intensification of the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe (and, slightly later, in Namibia) signalled important shifts in the regional orientations and concerns of the South African state. A two-pronged policy was adopted, which amounted to a form of regional neo-colonialism. Alliances were cultivated with the comprador regimes of Malawi and the Ivory Coast while an interventionist military role in the various Southern African decolonisation struggles was assumed, most dramatically evidenced by the invasion of Angola in 1975. The forced withdrawal of the South African army from Angola in the face of Soviet/Cuban intervention and the failure of expected military support from the United States to materialise, led to a scaling down of direct involvement and a shift to unconventional tactics and operations aimed at destabilising the newly-installed Angolan and Mozambiquean governments (Davies, 1989). These developments were to acquire considerable internal significance, forming the underpinning of the state's strategy of "reform from above" aimed at countering the "total onslaught" waged against it from both within and without its borders. The visible presence of hostile regimes and armies in neighbouring states, aided and equipped by the Soviet Union which at the time was

enjoying considerable diplomatic and ideological success in the region, was enough of a self-evident threat to enable the mobilisation of the white population and sections of the black in a "total strategy" against a perceived "total onslaught". This repressive-reformist strategy entailed enlarging and considerably refining internal and external security apparatuses at the same time as extending limited political concessions to sections of the black population in order to counter the appeal of revolutionary or insurrectionist ideologies (Swilling & Philips, 1989).

The successful decolonisation struggles in the region allowed an increase in the scale of internal guerrilla operations mounted by the liberation armies from bases located in the newly-independent states. The immediate effect of this development was to allow the heightened visibility of guerrilla operations that is reflected in the content of the literature of the second half of the decade.¹²

III

It can be noted that the steady decline in the South African economy that has continued unabated since the 1970s was precipitated by global economic developments (notably the dramatic rise and fall in the gold price, the Middle East oil crisis), which revealed and exacerbated existing structural weaknesses in the South African economy (Lodge 1983: 326). However, this does not mean that the general relationship of the region to the world system can be reduced to one of simple dependence. Following Stadler, it is necessary to maintain a sense of the simultaneously global and parochial dimensions within which the South African social formation is situated: "Despite the truism that the [Southern African] region is unique in its political configurations, it represents a variation on the history of that part of the world which lies outside of the metropolitan areas, shaped by

rather than shaping, responding to rather than initiating, the major developments in contemporary world history" (1987: 10). This formulation would tend to place South Africa within the territory of what Samir Amin has described as the "peripheral capitalist model of development", which operates by the alliance of capitalist interests at the centre with the "parasitic" classes of the periphery, a complex of unequal relationships which results "in a transfer of values from the periphery to the center" (1976: 359). However, the dominance of South Africa in the region and the advanced state of internal capitalist development, particularly following the Second World War has meant that the country has "exercised an influence, notwithstanding its international isolation and precarious internal political structure, far beyond its borders" (Stadler, 1987: 10).

The semi-peripherality of South Africa within the contemporary global order, generally experienced as marginality, provincialism or isolation, tends to give a heightened appearance of importance to the domestic. In the face of international marginality, the national gains central importance. In the case of South Africa this tendency is exacerbated by the political and economic crisis which became increasingly overt during the seventies. The growing political, cultural and economic isolation of the country as a result of the sanctions movement, coupled with an aggressive campaign to ensure the dominance of South Africa over its regional neighbours combine to give centrality to the local; the local tends to appear as untouched by the international. The obsessive focus upon domestic politics that results serves to obscure the relationships of peripherality, the wider lines of force that impinge upon the domestic situation. What Spivak calls "a fixation on national scenes" results, which forms part of a process of production of "screen-allegories that foreclose a reading of the broader narratives of imperialism" (1988: 290-1). It is important to see that this screening out of the fact of marginality

is both a resistant and a conservative phenomenon: at once a form of protectionism and a form of denial. By analogy with certain forms of nationalism, a fixation on the national can appear as at once a strategy of containment and exclusion (as conservative) and as a necessary defence against neo-imperialism (as resistant). Accordingly, the political discourses of the seventies return again and again to the national problematic, the question of the "South African situation". This national problematic comes in turn to inform the cultural discourses of the period. At least one symptom of this process is the literary-critical prescription that South African writing give attention to "material factors of oppression and struggle in contemporary South Africa" (Vaughan, 1982b: 137), and the concomitant tendency to take as a mark of pathology the fact that a particular text does not. The national problematic informs in turn a defensiveness towards what are defined as "foreign" or "western" discourses, as well as, by a contradictory process, imbuing them with all the desirability of the "developed" or the "advanced". In the cultural sphere, this nation-centered focus tends to obscure the international markets, circuits and networks which both inform South African culture and within which it is received and consumed.

In his description of the shifts in cultural practice in South Africa since the 1950s, Tony Morphet identifies "two principal forces" at work in the formation of "cultural" or "social imagination":

The first is the need to comprehend, to express and to judge the all too obvious conditions of oppression. The second is the need to understand and work with the concepts of imagination entering the South African cultural discourse from abroad--especially of course Western Europe and North America--but elsewhere as well. (1990b: 133)

Prior to the 1970s, the "dialectic" between these two forces had been kept under control by what Morphet terms the "liberal-formalist settlement", which derived from British and American New Criticism an

aesthetic maintaining that "the function of the [artistic] work was to carry, to the fullest degree possible, the variety, complexity and density of human experience and to organise its experiential freight into a universalising moral pattern" (1990b: 134). But by the 1970s, fundamental shifts in the direction, intensity and content of both of Morphet's "principal forces" necessitated the establishment of a new settlement, identified as "revisionist". For Morphet, the characteristic of revisionist intellectual and cultural practice distinguishing it from "liberal-formalism" is its association with political activity:

During the period of [revisionist] settlement one of the most striking features of intellectual practice was the migration of practitioners towards positions of significance. These migrations were both material and symbolic. ... The second feature of cultural practice was a steady foreshortening and narrowing of the perspectives of enquiry. This was in essence a product of the assumption underpinning the settlement; that cultural expression had itself a material character—it was history and in history simultaneously. History could be directly apprehended and intervened upon through cultural works. The powerful empirical thrust of revisionist historical work gave the warrant for, and secured the assumption. It was this which provided the point of closure for the settlement and as a result placed culture "in the struggle". (1990b: 138)

While I would agree that the period of revisionism is indeed marked by the politicisation of culture, there is nothing to indicate that, in the case of white intellectuals, their "migration ... towards positions of significance" is as straightforward or successful a journey as Morphet's abbreviative account might suggest. The revisionist discourses of the early 1970s reveal the considerable insecurity of their practitioners over the matter of the social significance and reach of their work. In the next chapter, I will outline the course taken by revisionist intellectual practice following its emergence in the early 1970s. The renovations of liberal paradigms effected by revisionism are a response to changing social and political conditions which made those paradigms no longer tenable.

Initially drawing upon the resources of structuralism and its successors and upon the versions of Marxism then current in Western Europe, revisionist intellectuals attempt to resolve the question that equally taxes modernist white writing--that of the social and political consequence of their activities.

TWO

I

"White writing", notes Coetzee, "is only white insofar as it is generated by the concerns of people no longer European, not yet African" (1988b: 11). To consider white writing to be the product of people not yet African assumes the historical (or, at least, narratological) inevitability of African identity. The narrative that governs Coetzee's formulation can be elaborated as follows: beginning with the structuring, problematising arche of colonial settlement, proceeding through an interim internal-colonial (or "neocolonial") period, to a telos, the resolution that comes with decolonisation and the postcolonial period that follows. Contained in Coetzee's "not yet", then, is the promise and the present frustration of this resolution. White writing will cease to be distinguishable from any other African writing once the people who produce it have themselves become African. Until then, white writing will be a phenomenon of the interval, neither here nor there. In the unsettled "not yet" of South Africa's present, a form of writing identifiable as white can be expected to show all the symptoms of the uncertainties infecting its writers. In addition, it can be expected to reveal considerable anxiety about the whiteness that marks its continued association with a doomed colonial order.

Coetzee's definition relies on a familiar account of the South African political order. According to this account, the present South African state traces its origins to the initial colonial systematisations in British-held parts of the country in the nineteenth century and remains colonial in its political character.

(Wolpe, 1988: 60). The segregatory policies of the British colonial administration, designed to ensure white and capitalist dominance, were implemented on a national scale with the Act of Union in 1910, and subsequently acquired a local logic of development in confluence with the interests of Afrikaner nationalism. These initial economic impulses came to be translated into a sophisticated system of control and subjectification, underwritten by a complex and self-sustaining ideological apparatus--a narrative of superior and inferior racial types and cultures, of natural moral and intellectual domination, which explained away the repressive and segregated structures of South African society. This ideological apparatus both evolved out of, and itself helped to shape the concrete structures and divisions of the state in the years following the mineral discoveries in the late nineteenth century. Various modernised, energetically adapted to changing circumstances, continuously renamed, segregatory ideology stamped its forms upon on all levels of the social formation during the century that followed (Dubow, 1989).

Accordingly, the South African social formation, to the extent that it is a system of domination effectively excluding a racially-identified majority from political power or rights, continues to have the appearance of a colonial society, "resembling almost in caricature form the defunct colonial regimes of sub-Saharan Africa" (Stadler, 1987: 10-11). The Act of Union was thus a mere "official decolonisation"¹, effectively reinforcing the political subjugation of the black majority and allowing its continued exploitation by foreign and white-owned national capital (Stadler 1987, 11; Wolpe, 1988: 29). The apartheid state, founded in 1948 and constitutionally entrenched in 1961, is the outcome of an attempt to ground every level of the social formation upon the logic of racial domination. But, as has been outlined above, the past two decades have seen a bringing to overt crisis of this racially structured social formation. As if in

obedience to the descriptions of liberal-modernist political theory, the impulses and directions of the racial superstructure came to contradict the laws of motion of the economic substructure. The interests of racism and capitalism, which for nearly a century had been partners in a productive alliance, were to become increasingly divergent. The period sees ever more urgent attempts by racial capitalism to deracialise itself, as the crisis of capital accumulation occasioned by racial restrictions on economic expansion as well as the extreme instability occasioned by growing resistance to the system of racial domination meant that the costs of maintaining it could no longer be justified (Saul & Gelb, 1986).

This abbreviated account of a complex history serves to gloss what Coetzee has described as the "new, neocolonial" period following official decolonisation and the consequent distance that opens up between the apartheid state and its European antecedents. Coetzee identifies this period with a term drawn from analytical accounts of South African history that hold that what follows official decolonisation is a form of "internal colonialism". This term is employed to account for the fact that in South Africa the value extracted from an exploited class tends to circulate amongst a racially-distinct local capitalist class, rather than being exported to the metropole as is the case in ideal-typical colonialism. While South Africa exhibits the national oppression characteristic of colonial societies in general, the South African case is distinguished by the fact that the dominant nation occupies the same territory as the dominated nation (Hudson, 1989: 346). The term thus describes the disposition of relationships of domination and exploitation in the post-decolonisation period, thereby directing the attention of the liberation movement to its principal target. "On one level, that of 'white South Africa'," declared the 1977 version of Strategy and Tactics of the ANC, "there are all the features of an advanced

capitalist state in its final stage of industrial monopolies and the merging of industrial and finance capital". "But on another level," it continued, "that of 'Non-White South Africa', there are all the features of a colony ... non-White South Africa is the colony of white South Africa itself" (Wolpe, 1988: 30; emphasis original).

What Coetzee terms "neocolonialism" is thus the process of transfer of "possession" of the territory, its inhabitants and the products of their labour, from a metropolitan possessing class to a national one. Coetzee's version of recent South Africa history could thus be said to describe a form of introversion--the increasing concentration of an entire set of colonial relationships within national borders. Coetzee's description of a historical process and group of people immobilised between colonialism and post-colonialism is thus set out upon a theoretical model accounting for the contradictory phenomenon of an independent, non-metropolitan state which nevertheless demonstrates the major features of a colonial society (Stadler, 1987: 11). Any movement out of the situation Coetzee describes would entail a form of decolonisation. The white ruling fraction would have to be persuaded to relinquish its grip upon power, and to face whatever consequences followed the loss of colonial certainties.

The characterisation of the South African social formation as a form of internal colonialism or "Colonialism of a Special Type" (CST), was endorsed by the SACP in 1962 and by the ANC in 1969 and continues to be the official doctrine of the alliance. As such, the term serves as a description of present-day South African society as well as the theoretical underpinning for the alliance's strategy of pursuing initial national liberation as a vehicle for the subsequent attainment of socialist objectives. CST is the result of a confluence of racial and class-based perspectives on the apartheid system and its overthrow, the product of a long collaboration between nationalist and

communist liberation organisations (Hudson, 1989: 347-8; Wolpe 1988: 28-35). The theory evolved during the 1950s within the SACP, proving during the years of exile to be a "pragmatic theoretical tool" which could provide an "ideological glue" able to hold together the nationalist and communist arms of the alliance (Everatt, 1990: 33). The workings of the theory can be followed in a central text of alliance historiography, Simons and Simons's Class and Colour in South Africa (1969), which plots "the convergence and growing mutuality of socialist and nationalist politics which would be destined ultimately to pull together a movement 'national in form, socialist in content'" (Lodge, 1990: 174). Within the ANC itself, CST could be employed to explain away the divergence between the movement's present socialist interests and such "disjunctures in its own history" as its earlier espousal of a bourgeois nationalism (Lodge, 1990: 184).

However lengthy the period of service of the doctrine of Colonialism of a Special Type in the strategy and tactics of the liberation movements, its particular theoretical implications failed to have any significant impact on academic research and analysis within South Africa until the 1970s (Bozzoli & Delius, 1990: 15). While I have outlined some of the uses of the concept to the cause of nonracial alliance politics, it remains unclear what part it plays in what David Attwell has termed "the various revisionisms of South African literary-intellectual culture of the early seventies" (1990: 96). The series of rebellions and innovations within established academic discourses during this period indicates the challenge which the rapidly shifting social and political terrain presented to intellectuals. Following Attwell, an account of the "academic discursive context" surrounding the literature of the period can provide a sense of the wider social pressures to which both academic and literary revisionism are a response (1990: 119-20).

In a process that begins in the late 1960s, an increasing polarisation of the political situation between an intransigent white state and a radical and racially-exclusivist black opposition alerted white intellectuals and dissidents to the need to formulate alternatives to the dominant liberal accounts of their predicament. The liberal hold upon intellectual practice in a number of disciplines in the social sciences and humanities began to be substantially loosened during the 1970s by the rise of competing paradigms. The new paradigms developed from, on the one hand, the reinterpretations of African history, political and economic systems and culture which took their impetus from the decolonisation struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, and the rise of structuralism in Europe and the "new left" in Britain on the other (Bozzoli & Delius, 1990: 20). These stimulants encouraged the formation of a loose assembly of "scholars of the left", a "group of university-based and mainly white sociologists, historians, anthropologists, political scientists and literary theorists" (Bozzoli, 1990: 237).

Bozzoli's list of job-descriptions perhaps creates the impression of a discrete series of disciplinary reconsiderations. Yet, it is a definitive feature of revisionist practice that it does not restrict itself to the methodologies and networks of citations that mark a disciplinary habitat, instead priding itself on its cross-disciplinary versatility. So, for Marks and Atmore in their introduction to one of the seminal works of the new history, Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa (1980), the collected essays are "all, in some sense, an attempt to come to grips with what the Annales school have felicitously called 'total history'. They are are written in the belief that the division of history, and indeed the social sciences, into fragmented, specialised branches of knowledge is at best inadequate, at worst grossly misleading" (1980: 3).¹⁴

The revisionists attempted to find new theoretical models to explain the impact upon the South African political economy of the peculiar version of capitalism that develops from colonial conquest, and to chart the complex and interlocking relationship between race and class it established. In addition, renewed attention was given to the role of blacks in the establishment of the apartheid order and in its overthrow, and to the composition, function and reach of the authoritarian state (Bozzoli & Delius, 1990: 13-4). Accordingly, the new accounts of South African history and political economy that develop out of revisionism tend to oscillate between four key terms: colonial conquest, capitalist development, racial oppression and class domination (Bundy, 1986). By attempting "to establish the credentials of Marxism in a society which at first sight appears to be constructed racially, and to set itself against the prevailing assumptions of evolutionism and integration", the historical materialist analyses of the revisionist school were able to find a way out of the exclusionary dyadism of nationalist politics and the self-serving complacencies of liberalism (Bozzoli & Delius, 1990: 21).

It should be noted that the term "revisionism" is generally used to cover a variety of paradigmatic innovations in a wide intellectual field over a period of two decades. Bozzoli and Delius remark that the "various intellectual strands identified and discussed" in their account of revisionist history "do not form a single, cumulative, or coherent body of work". Instead, they add, "[t]here have been sharp discontinuities between the approaches of different periods and groupings" (1990: 13). Nevertheless, a single factor uniting all these strands is the influence of historical materialism. This factor gives rise to analyses that, however divergent their content or theoretical basis, are broadly concerned with "the socio-economic basis of societies and its relationship to ideology and politics" (Marks & Atmore, 1980: 3). My own interest in revisionism covers the

period of its earliest emergence during the 1970s. During this period, revisionist production came to be dominated by a form of Marxism which, according to Lodge,

is heavily economistic, in which culture and consciousness tightly correspond to a series of stages in economic development. The oppressed society has no internal topography, all share in a common experience and all resist equally in response to the calls of a prophetic vanguard. The society is ideologically uniform and socially homogenous, its struggle is national because the ruling class in certain respects resembles a colonial order, not because it has specific cultural characteristics. In this view culture becomes epiphenomenal, something which can be taken virtually for granted, "national in form, socialist in content". (1990: 184)

I will argue that revisionism, in its vanguardist or "structuralist" phase, rather than being, as it may appear, an index of the confidence of its writers, is a product of considerable cultural insecurity. This insecurity both provokes the initial revisionist impulse and influences its subsequent course. The literary activity of this period reacts to the uncertain historical environment it shares with academic revisionism in similar ways.

There is an additional reason for examining the precipitants of this early phase of revisionism in some detail. The expanded range of political possibilities of the late 1970s and 1980s enabled revisionism in a variety of disciplines to move from rigid theoreticism towards attempts to popularise both the content and the reach of intellectual work.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the revisionist tendency within literary studies was to remain strongly influenced by a version of Althusserianism for a longer period (Visser, 1990: 73-4). The strained and, in some cases, antagonistic relationship between white writers and a "prophetic vanguard" of Marxist-inclined literary critics was to dominate literary-critical discourse during the 1980s, and strongly influence literary developments during this period.

II

It is worthwhile examining at some length the operation of the new revisionist paradigms and their relation to the concept of internal colonialism in Richard Turner's The Eye of the Needle (1972), described by Attwell as the "exemplary book of the period" (1990: 120). Some of this exemplary status derives from the fact that the book derived from Turner's contribution to the political commission of the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society (SPRO-CAS), one of the "major discursive events of the early seventies" (Attwell, 1990: 121). SPRO-CAS took the form of a series of six commissions of inquiry held between 1969 and 1973 under the auspices of the Christian Institute and the South African Council of Churches, centrally concerned with a perceived need for "change" to the apartheid system.¹⁴ While the Project attracted the participation of a number of radicals as well as representatives of the Black Consciousness Movement, it nevertheless ended up dominated by whites and by liberal interests (Stadler, 1975). The centrality given to the issue of "change" by the Project is a measure of the disturbance felt by liberal orthodoxies threatened with a deterioration in political stability. The Project saw the liberal meliorist conviction--that the logic of capitalist development and economic growth would, of its own accord, bring the oppressed into positions of political and economic competitiveness--replaced by a variety of more interventionist proposals. The co-ordinated reports that emerge from the deliberations of the various commissions are thus preoccupied with the need to promote structural reform of the racial restrictions on access to political rights and economic advancement. Additional urgency, as well as a sense of its own redundancy, was lent to the Project by the perception that, in the words of its director, Peter Randall, "changes would be initiated by blacks; increasingly initiative was passing into

black hands" (quoted in Stadler, 1975: 103). Nevertheless, the Project's arguments for reform led from above by the existing institutions of white power, would, in the course of the decade, be replicated by the official reform programme of the state. As such, and in spite of the hostility it attracted from the state during the course of its deliberations, SPRO-CAS can be considered an anticipation of subsequent shifts in "the centre of gravity in white political opinion" (Stadler, 1987: 162-3).

But Turner's book represents a significant departure from the anxious reformism of most the SPRO-CAS publications and commissions. Indeed, Turner disassociated himself from the final report of the political commission to which he had been contributor, choosing instead to set down his views in The Eye of the Needle, published under the auspices of SPRO-CAS (Rich, 1989: 11). For Turner, the perceived need for change which had animated the Project did not entail merely softening the blows the system dealt to those it exploited. "Political and economic power is concentrated in white hands", Turner stated bluntly. As a consequence, "real change can be brought about only by a fundamental redistribution of wealth and power" (1980: 76). In concluding that significant social transformation in South Africa can only be achieved by the very processes that the SPRO-CAS project was concerned to prevent, Turner distances his analysis from the general tenor of a reformism which sought ways to free the benevolent capitalist economy from the pathological encumbrance of racism.

The revisionist character of Turner's book can be seen most clearly in his unseating of the concept of racism from its central place in analyses of South African society. The obtrusive and seemingly intractable problematic of South African society, "racial oligarchy" (1980: 6), is revealed to be an effect of the foundation of an advanced capitalist economy upon the initial stratifications

established by colonial conquest. Turner argued for the necessity of a process of critical historicisation that would uncover the roots of racial pathology in South Africa. Contrary to all appearances, racial domination did not originate in an immemorial division of the world between civilised and non-civilised peoples. The fetishized analytical category of race obscured both the colonial origins of the present crisis and the fact of racism's functionality to capitalist development. According to Morphet, Turner's analysis is distinctive in its context in that it shows the racial banality of South African society to be interpretable. Turner dismantles racial mythologies by revealing them to be the products of historical development and hence susceptible to change. This process of interpretation is conducted by means of "a double perspective or (to use Paul Ricoeur's term)--a double hermeneutic: the hermeneutics of hope ('where it could go') and the hermeneutics of suspicion ('what it is and where it is going')" (Morphet, 1990a: 94).

Returning to the general themes of the internal colonialism thesis, it is notable that, for Turner, the present racially-differentiated access to economic and political power in South Africa is a function of its colonial past: "Occupation of land by the whites, resulting in pressure on the land resources of the local people, conflict between the local tribes, war, and white victory, followed by a 'lack of inclination' to return the land: That is the history of South Africa" (1980: 24). Colonialism is described as a rapacious process of conquest and acquisition, enabled by superior military technology and fueled by the accumulative logic of capitalism. Turner implicates the project of "civilisation" in the processes of subjugation and reorganisation of the colonial territory and its inhabitants, revealing it to be as much a document of barbarism as the benighted social systems and values from which it distinguished itself (Morphet, 1990a: 91-2):

Until white South Africans come to understand that their present society and their present position is a result not of their own virtues but of their vices; until they come to see world history over the last five hundred years not as the "triumph of white civilisation", but simply as the bloody and ambiguous birth of a new technology; and until they come to see these things not in guilt for the past but in hope for the future, they will not be able to communicate with black people, nor, ultimately with each other. (1980: 92)

By implicating capitalism and colonialism equally in the long history of dispossession and exploitation in South Africa, Turner deprives white rule of the ideological solace of the liberal tradition which maintained that, without the retardation of racism, the advance of capitalism would evenly distribute the benefits of "civilisation" through society.

In accordance with the positive pole of Turner's hermeneutic, the highly visible contradiction between the collective nature of production and the racial nature of appropriation in the South African version of capitalism should generate the social forces capable of bringing about a revolutionary break with the present system. It is in this regard, argues Morphet, that Turner identified the latent transformative power of the black working class (1990: 92). But Turner's analysis is not as orthodox as it may at first appear. It is significant that Turner, in response to the question "who is going to change society?" (1980: 84), gives initial emphasis to communal and egalitarian cultural values of pre-capitalist or "tribal" society which resist the ideological conditioning associated with the capitalist economy (1980: 85-7). A similar centrality is accorded to the nationalism of the Black Consciousness Movement, which, Turner argues, is capable of mobilising a racially-defined "community of the oppressed" against the tainted cultural values of white society (1980: 87-90). Rather than pinning his hopes on an emergent working class, Turner gives centrality to broadly anti-colonial political impulses. Working-class consciousness and socialist transformation of society is

accorded a supplementary, or, at best, consecutive position in Turner's assessment of South Africa's revolutionary prospects.

It is clear that Turner recognised the success of ideologies of national liberation in African decolonisation struggles and their transformative potential in South Africa. But in spite of this initial success, it had become evident by the 1970s that national liberation had fulfilled few of its revolutionary promises. The new nationalist regimes of postcolonial Africa failed to effect significant changes to the relations of economic domination and exploitation definitive of colonialism. The political structures of colonialism were dismantled only to be replaced by the decentered and transnational apparatuses of neocolonialism, demonstrating that there is no inevitable connection between national liberation and social transformation. Accordingly for Turner, the useful ideological impulses of national liberation had to be supplemented by an attention to the need to transform the underlying economic structures enabling colonial exploitation:

Thus an assertion of the dignity of blackness is not enough. It must be accompanied by an analysis of the conflicts of interest among the black people and by a positive orientation towards a future society. And it is necessary that this should include a specific rejection of the values of capitalist society. For in South Africa it is the acceptance of such values that is the most potent threat to the unity of the black people. (1980: 89-90)

Whereas a more orthodox Marxism would uphold the centrality of class conflict to the history and the future of "all hitherto existing societies", Turner relegates class analysis here to a position where it is merely a "necessary" (ie, required rather than inevitable) accompaniment to nationalist assertions. Nationalist ideological mobilisation of a putative "unity of the black people" against the values of white society, is given precedence over promoting working-class consciousness and over the mobilisation of organised labour in directly economic struggles. This concentration on nationalist and

precolonial impulses in Turner's survey of the disposition of oppositional forces shows up the resemblance between his conclusions and the two-phased logic of the internal colonialism thesis.

Central to Turner's account is a vindication of the socially-transformative potential of alterations in individual consciousness, and a commitment to finding forms of thought which escape the strictures of the dominant:

Unless I can see the way in which social forces impinge upon me and structure my relationships with other people, I cannot escape from mere role-playing, from patterned responses to the other. The stereotypical reaction of white to black is only the most obvious expression of a society in which all relationships, from courtship to commuting, become stereotyped. All relations become rituals. ... But these patterns can be broken. And it is important to show the whites what they have to gain from a free democratic society. Once cultural preservation and development become freed from the preservation of privilege it becomes possible to visualise a society in which cultural identity does not imply exclusivity and fear. (1980: 91-2)

Turner stresses here the necessity for a critique of the colonial past and present of the South African social order. By determining the nature and the factors that condition the present system, a sense of its limits can be obtained and alternative modes of thought and action can be retrieved from cultural amnesia. It is important however to underline the ambiguity of the position that is set out here. While Turner is concerned with the need to defamiliarise and ultimately displace the "stereotypical" intersubjective relationships conditioned by apartheid, he nevertheless retains the potentially divisive category of "cultural identity" in his projected society. We have seen that, for Turner, the best chance for movement out of the untenable stasis of apartheid society lay in the central nationalist aspiration for restoration of the stolen land to the indigenous people. Such a nationalism was mobilised by appeals to the social values and arrangements of precolonial society and by demonstrations of the illegality of the white presence in South Africa. But anti-

colonial struggle of this sort offered no secure place for white intellectual activity and for any social alternatives that it may propose. While the increasing racial antagonism generated by the apartheid system provides the potential for its downfall, it is precisely this antagonism which restricts the capacity of white intellectuals to distance themselves from the system, and to survive its destruction.

Morphet has pointed out the extent to which Turner's analysis is grounded in "the traditional conceptual bastion of liberalism--the individual consciousness" (1990: 98). In a situation where collective forms of organisation are routinely frustrated by the well-developed repressive apparatuses of the state, individual action tends to become the repository of oppositional impulses prohibited everywhere else. In addition, the increasing polarisation of South African society into two monolithic racial categories as a result of the activities of the state and its opposition, gives little hope for white dissidence to consolidate itself into a substantial and useful collectivity. Turner is accordingly concerned with defending the value of individual intellectual labour in an untenable social situation. However monolithic the system, it is the duty of the intellectual to keep faith with the idea that it could be overthrown. We have seen that Turner's rigorous historicisation of the present situation serves to reveal the hidden fissures in the seemingly impenetrable surface of white power. A positive or utopian analytical orientation then directs the oppositional impulses so detected towards the goal of socialism:

I must come to see the world as able to be changed. I must come to see myself as having the capacity to play a part in changing it. And I must see that my capacity to do this can be realised only in co-operation with other people. (1980: 85)

But in the stratified colonial situation, the capacity of white dissidence to realise its goals in "co-operation with other people" is drastically restricted. Accordingly, Turner tends to give compensatory weight to the potential of individual critical intellectual activity: "Perhaps the most important step in bringing something about is that of becoming aware that it could exist. And probably all I can hope to do here is to convince you of this" (1980: 84).

But where the most significant forms of oppositional consciousness and organisation in South African society are directed against white institutions and values, any moral stature white intellectual activity may gain from its oppositional stance is offset by its association with white cultural domination and the discredited project of "civilisation":

We are aware of the terrible role played by our education and religion in creating amongst us a false understanding of ourselves. We must therefore work out schemes not only to correct this, but further to be our own authorities rather than wait to be interpreted by others. Whites can only see us from the outside and as such can never extract and analyse the ethos in the black community. (Biko, 1979: 53)

Biko's rejection of white intellectual activity in the name of a populist valorisation of "black" communal values is reminiscent of Fanon's critique of the deployment of western intellectual values in the service of colonial authority and power:

The colonialist bourgeoisie, in its narcissistic dialogue, expounded by members of its universities, had in fact deeply implanted in the minds of the colonized intellectual that the essential qualities remained eternal in spite of all the blunders men may make: the essential qualities of the West, of course. The native intellectual accepted the cogency of these ideas, and deep down in his brain you could always find a vigilant sentinel ready to defend the Graeco-Latin pedestal. Now it so happens that during the struggle for liberation, at the moment that the native intellectual comes into touch again with his people, this artificial sentinel is turned into dust. All the Mediterranean values--the triumph of the human individual, of clarity and of beauty--become lifeless, colourless knick-knacks. All those

speeches seem like collections of dead words; those values which seemed to uplift the soul are revealed as worthless, simply because they have nothing to do with the concrete conflict in which the people is engaged. (Fanon, 1967: 36)

Although the "Mediterranean values" of enlightened individualism develop out of the struggles of the European bourgeoisie against feudal absolutism, Fanon rejects them on the basis of their Western origins and their association with the colonial project. The category of the "human individual", which once vindicated rebellion against arbitrary authority, is tainted by its complicity in the divisive strategies of colonial pacification and its consequent destructive impact upon precolonial subjectivity. At the same time as Turner reveals the glamorised values of enlightenment, progress and civilisation to be complicit in the lucrative subjectification of colonial populations, he finds it necessary to defend a western intellectual tradition grounded upon the critical capacities of Fanon's derided "human individual". Fanon's or Biko's turn to the alternative values of "the people" is, in Turner's case, highly restricted.

Perhaps the best index of the ambiguity of Turner's analysis lies in his insistent defence, throughout the book, of "the necessity of utopian thinking". Utopianism indicates a sense of dissatisfaction with the present either on the basis of a metaphysical nostalgia for what is no longer and what cannot be; or, on the basis of a sense of what things ought to be, it is a projected point of resolution of the "stubborn negation" of things as they are now (Jameson, 1974: 111). While Turner defends his work by characterising it as utopian in the positive sense of the term, his analysis is vulnerable to the charge that its utopianism renders it impractical and unlikely, distanced from what is possible. Morphet reports that a member of the SPRO-CAS Commission thought the book to be "a hundred years before its time" (1980: xxiv). The comment expresses disapproval of Turner's

idealistic detachment from the possibilities of the present, as much as it does admiration for his prescience.¹⁷ Certainly, whether approval or censure of Turner's farsightedness, the comment testifies to the baleful grip of the present upon political analysis and projection. That, viewed from the early 1970s, the goal of a deracialised democracy in South Africa could seem like science fiction says something of the apparent intractability of the racial logic governing both the status quo and the limited repertoire of oppositional positions included within the mechanisms of white hegemony. According to Attwell, Turner attempts to "project ethical and political alternatives as being thinkable, in a culture which blocked them" (1990: 121). Turner's insistent characterisation of his analysis as a form of utopianism indicates the apparent totality of the system that shields what is possible ("where it could go") from view. His critical distance from both white and black mainstream political thought enables him to see the blockage and beyond it. But any political force his analysis may have is neutralised by the very distance that enables it.

III

The preceding discussion has located Turner's work as an anticipation of the content and themes of the wave of revisionism within the academic fields of historiography and the social and political sciences. Turner's rejection of the claims of the present South African racial capitalist order to represent achieved "civilisation" or to have any capacity to create an equitable society in the future, is neutralised by a political and cultural distance from the oppositional forces which possess the capacity to counterpose or overthrow this discredited order. As a result, the book performs a negative critique of the situation in which it finds itself, while any

way out of the well-entrenched status quo remains the object of "utopian" considerations. Turner's defence of the capacity of class analysis to reveal the hidden fractures within the apparent seamlessness of racial polarisation is nevertheless consigned to a supplementary role to nationalist assertion and mobilisation, its usefulness is by no means assured.

Turner's perception of the limited political reach of his analysis makes it an exception to some of the more confident theorisations that follow it. The book is a product of considerable cultural insecurity, as its ambiguity about its own cultural status demonstrates. Yet, the contrasting tone of much subsequent revisionist literature, expressing confident faith in the totalising instruments of class analysis and the modes of production narrative to penetrate beneath the racial superficialities of South African society, can equally be interpreted as a product of the same insecurity. The obvious, "colonial" racial divisions of South African society generate obvious "anticolonial" solutions to it. By scornfully rejecting the obvious, revisionist intellectuals could assure themselves of the necessity for scientific analysis of the situation, employing the developed instruments of Enlightenment thought. The task of the intellectual could become that of theoretically-informed direction of what would otherwise be merely impulsive mass action. Intellectual work would have the task of bringing to the attention of the masses the historical agency that theory has predicted for them. The revisionist intellectual could take comfort from Lenin's insistence that "without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement" (1947: 26). Accordingly, unless a given movement displayed theoretically-correct characteristics, it could, reassuringly enough, not be considered revolutionary. The leitmotif of revisionism--that, contrary to all appearances, the enemy was not white rule but the capitalist economy--

served to keep white intellectual production, in Foucault's phrase, "somewhat ahead and to the side" of populist conceptions and struggles (Foucault, 1977: 207-8). "There was a contradiction", as Bozzoli and Delius note in their assessment of revisionist historiography, "between the theoretical analyses which proclaimed the death of 'race' on the one hand, and on the other, the social movements of 1976 onwards--movements which were based in communities as well as at work places, which erupted in townships as well as through trade unions, many of which were black, youthful, and implicitly or explicitly nationalist in orientation" (1990: 28).

Noting the failure of revisionist studies of the history of the South African peasantry to have any effect on the urban fixations of the self-consciously politicised black writing that emerges in the 1970s, Njabulo Ndebele comments:

For historical reasons, only the whites have some access to the best educational facilities. This means that any research of radical interest which, by definition, has to emanate from, and its evaluation be situated in, the very current of the African struggle as it evolves, has no organic relationship with that struggle. So it cannot enrich the struggle in the immediate instance. This is so from the perspective of information giving as well as the assimilation of that information (1984: 43).

Recognising this, Turner had maintained that white intellectuals should associate themselves with the concrete struggles being waged in the country, particularly on the industrial front. He established an organisation aimed at enabling white student involvement in labour issues, and maintained contact with the trade union movement in spite of obstruction by the state (Frederikse, 1990: 138). But the climate of extreme repression during the early 1970s made even the most gestural white participation in trade union activity difficult. The influence of Black Consciousness served to shut would-be white activists out of populist movements, while the liberation movements were to remain out of sight and preoccupied with internal politics'

until the late 1970s (Lodge, 1983: 295-7). As a consequence of these inhibitions, much of early revisionist production barricades itself behind the rigidities of theory.

However much Turner anticipates and influences the development of revisionist historiography and political economy, it is particularly his preoccupation with the pervasiveness and tenacity of colonial consciousness that separates his account from the later career of the movement.¹⁰ Structuralist revisionism was at pains to demonstrate the mere epiphenomenality of what the "Revolutionary Programme" of the ANC had identified as "the national sense of grievance" (quoted, Lodge, 1983: 300). Turner, however, attached considerable importance to the coloniality of the South African social order and to the forms of culture, subjectivity and consciousness it established. It is this preoccupation that connects Turner's book to the modernist white writing of the 1970s. Like Turner, this writing is deeply concerned with the colonial attributes of its social and cultural environment. Equally, this writing is preoccupied with the necessary and difficult task of freeing itself from the obstructive weight of received practices, assumptions and institutions.

"Every individual experience is in some way unique," Turner claimed, "and in this uniqueness lies the possibility that the socialisation process may fail" (1980: 84). This defence of individual capacity to escape enclosure by agencies of subjectification, when taken together with Turner's largely uncritical valorisation of the communalist values of precolonial society, shows up the extent to which his analysis is influenced by the ideology of the Black Consciousness Movement, its strategies of "conscientisation" and "psychologism" and its celebration of a mythical precolonial past (Rich, 1989: 11; Stadler: 1987: 171-2). But this tentative endorsement of Black Consciousness ought not to obscure the traumatic relationship that existed between the Movement and the white

intellectual establishment. The fluctuations of this relationship were to have a profound effect upon the conduct of intellectual practice in South Africa. Accordingly, before attempting to situate white writing within the general context sketched out for academic revisionism, it is necessary to consider some of the implications of Black Consciousness for both revisionism and its literary contemporaries.

IV

As white revisionists denounced their intellectual patrimony and began to inventory the habits of domination in which they had been schooled, an ideological upheaval of similar magnitude struck black intellectuals and students. The self-censure of much early revisionism contrasts with the new-found spirit of positivity and assertiveness that is the product of an ideology celebrating black culture and achievement. In this section I will outline the origins of the Black Consciousness ideology, and the extent of its deployment among the political organisations and discourses of the period. My interest in doing so, however, is not in charting an institutional history of the Movement.¹⁹ Rather, I am concerned with assessing the impact of Black Consciousness upon the intellectual and cultural scene during the 1970s, particularly upon hegemonic practices of thought, analysis and discourse. Black Consciousness contributed to the delegitimation of liberal paradigms and attacked their institutional power. At the same time, it exercised a substantial influence over the new forms of thought attempting to establish themselves in liberalism's place. If the Movement helped to ensure that liberalism was untenable as a white intellectual practice during the 1970s, it helped too to ensure that the viability of any successor could not be an easily settled matter.

The 1970s saw a qualitative change in the configuration of the political terrain and the disposition of social forces within it. The processes of urbanisation and proletarianisation gave rise to ideologies competing to fill the gap created by the destruction of the systems of self-identification and aspiration provided by older social forms. Such an ideology was Black Consciousness, a version of the cultural nationalism that had given expression to the political impulses of the African decolonisation struggles following the Second World War. In postcolonial Africa, the acquisition of formal independence saw the stark polarities of racially-ordered exploitation and domination replaced by other less visible categories: internal class domination and the transnational polarities of the international division of labour (Amin, 1976: 194-196, 359-361). Accordingly, cultural nationalism began to decline in Africa at large just as it began a brief but important resurgence in South Africa in the form of Black Consciousness. The ideology of Black Consciousness is shaped by a series of selective importations from the writings of the African anti-colonial Movement, particularly Fanon's analyses of the destructive psychological impact of colonialism. A secondary and more contemporary influence on Black Consciousness was found in the Black Power tendency of the civil rights movement in the United States (Gerhart, 1978: 274).

The Fanonian model of decolonisation as a vindictory turning of the tables upon the former colonial order has important correlatives in the cultural movements that give expression to the political impulses of the post-war decolonisation struggles. Fanon described the colonised as imprisoned in the Sartrean paradigm of being-for-others, a state of being where meaning is possessed by the Other: "Every colonized people--in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death of and burial of its local cultural originality--finds itself face to face with the

language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the metropolitan culture" (Fanon, 1982: 14). The colonised are held hostage by the monopolisation of the right to speak and the means of intelligibility by the colonizer: in Gordimer's formulation, "Blacks have seen white culture, naked, for what it has proved to be, for blacks: posited as an absolute value and eternally withheld from them" (1976: 116). Decolonisation then entails the violent rejection of the Other in the name of the self, an overturning of the Manichean logic in which the colonised has been instructed: "as I begin to recognize that the Negro is the symbol of sin, I catch myself hating the Negro. But then I note that I am a Negro" (Fanon, 1982: 140). The cultural manifestations of decolonisation, Négritude and cultural nationalism, amount to a positive affirmation of blackness in the face of the negative terms imposed upon it by colonialism.

The appeal of the South African manifestation of the ideology was at first limited to relatively privileged sectors of the black population--the students and intellectuals of the new segregated universities. As it gravitated into the organisational forms and discourses of the Black Consciousness Movement, the ideology widened into a form of "popular-democratic" nationalism²⁰ aimed at establishing a more comprehensive support base (Lodge, 1983: 322). But, in spite of its attempts to forge links with other sectors of the population, and particularly the working class, the organisations of Black Consciousness largely retained a class composition among students and the black petty bourgeoisie (Hirson, 1979). However, it is necessary to emphasize that although the ideology may have been restricted in its immediate support base to an aspirant urban middle class, its fundamental tenets and impulses achieved a far wider circulation:

Of course it could be contended that the problems of self-identity and cultural emasculation were of relevance only to those who were most affected by "white" cultural hegemony, that

the concerns of Black Consciousness were rather precious in the light of the daily struggle for existence of working-class men and women. This may have been the case but it scarcely diminishes the movement's importance. If its influence was limited to the urban intelligentsia this would have guaranteed its imprint on almost any African political assertion of the time. Distilled to a basic set of catchphrases Black Consciousness percolated down to a much broader and socially amorphous group than African intellectuals. (Lodge, 1983: 325)

As the decade progressed, cultural and ideological aspects of popular democratic "national" struggle came increasingly to inform and to be interlinked with worker's issues, serving to reduce fissures created by the class structure of the black population and contradictions between the interests of the black working-class and those of other class-fractions (Saul & Gelb, 168-77). Thus while it can be claimed that Black Consciousness elided substantial distinctions within the black population, it should be recognised that the ideology in fact helps to create the situation it describes by easing the conscious impact of class and ideological fractures within the ranks of "the people".

Any hopes of a fit between black consciousness and working-class politics were cut off by the murder in detention of Steve Biko and the banning of 17 Black Consciousness-affiliated organisations in 1977. Though the Black Consciousness tradition was continued after the bannings by AZAPO and its affiliates and the National Forum, the bannings substantially retarded the organisational momentum of the Movement, and it did not recover the political centrality it had held during the period of the Revolt and its immediate aftermath (Hirson, 1979: chaps 4, 16; Fatton, 1986).

Notwithstanding the material and organisational limitations of the Movement, its ideology provided the expressive forms which would shape a number of the cultural impulses of the period. Indeed, the Movement gave considerable weight to issues of culture, and considered cultural activity as a key instrument for the promotion of its

political aims (Sole, 1983: 60). According to Hirson, the young activists of the Movement saw themselves as "going to liberate people from the 'psychological oppression' that kept them quiescent; they were going to bring back 'black culture', let people 'rediscover their history', bring the message of a god that would liberate, and in fact let each black man and woman discover anew their 'personal identity'" (1979: 290). Though verging on the parodic, Hirson's account does bring home the extent to which political strategies of the Movement were centered upon (or, restricted to) the concept of consciousness. Since oppression was a psychological state induced by the cultural mechanisms of white hegemony, the process of liberation entailed a form of debriefing of the oppressed subject, followed by a corrective process of "conscientisation". Once made aware of their history and their potential and the distorted account of themselves programmed into them by white culture, black people would realise "the need to rally together ... around the cause of their oppression--the blackness of their skin--and to operate as a group to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude" (Biko, 1979: 92).

Hirson compares the impact of the Movement's consciousness-raising to Fanon's ambiguous appraisal of the nationalist movements of Africa: "The [nationalist] politicians ... make the people dream dreams. They avoid the actual overthrowing of the State, but in fact they introduce into their readers' or hearers' consciousness the terrible ferment of subversion" (Fanon, 1967: 53; Hirson, 1979: 292, 112). That Black Consciousness should concentrate its energy on the creation of "dreams" rather than the "overthrowing of the State", reflects the unavailability of more confrontational forms of political action in the repressive 1970s, as much as it does the fact that the Movement drew most of its support from an aspirant intelligentsia: students, clerics, writers and journalists associated with the segregated universities (Stadler, 1987: 170).

Black Consciousness confronted white intellectuals with the dialectical implications of the processes of domination and subjectification that had long ensured their cultural ascendancy. The apartheid system and its predecessors identified and targetted a group of people, setting them aside as constitutively different. But this process went further than mere differentiation, instead turning non-whiteness into the necessitated and subordinated term of a violent hierarchy. It is by an analogous process that the administrative and discursive apparatuses of colonialism permitted, according to Bhabha, "a form of governmentality that in marking out a 'subject-nation', appropriates, directs and dominates its various spheres of activity" (1986: 154). Denied any capacity to represent itself in the systems established by colonial rule, the subject-population must therefore be represented: "The colonised population is ... deemed to be the cause and effect of the system, imprisoned in the circle of interpretation" (Bhabha, 1986: 171). The logical first stage of resistance to this process involves the inversion of the hierarchy, turning the divisory and subordinating structurations against themselves (Parry, 1987: 30). "As far as the native is concerned", Fanon wrote, "morality is very concrete; it is to silence the settler's defiance, to break his flaunting violence--in a word, to put him out of the picture". This version of decolonisation thus entails the retributive application of colonialism's strategies of exclusion and silencing: "[the native] has already decided to eject [the settler] and take his place" (Fanon, 1967: 34). The racialism of the colonial system thus gives rise to its negation: the politicised assertion of a communal identity set off against that of the oppressor. Those made other by racial differentiation recognise their difference, but use this recognition as the strategic basis for a countervailing assertion of positivity. "Merely by describing yourself as black", wrote Biko in a manifesto of the Movement, "you have started on a road towards emancipation, you

have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being" (1979: 48).

The acquisition of political consciousness by the new historical agents of the seventies presents a resistance to the silencing, repression, and subjective distortions effected by the discourses and practices of racial authority. Black Consciousness attempts the setting up of a counter-discourse to the discourse of white racism: "in all fields Black Consciousness seeks to talk to the black man in a language that is his own" (Biko, 1979: 32). This discourse, constructed around nationalist narratives of the redemptive emancipation of the self by the communal overthrow of an oppressing power, can offer no place within its narratives of belonging for the white settler: "So blatantly exploitative in terms of the mind and the body is the practice of white racism that one wonders if the interests of blacks and whites in this country have not become so mutually exclusive as to exclude the possibility of there being 'room for all of us at the rendezvous of victory'" (Biko, 1979: 61). Moreover, the logic of collective identity requires the principled rejection of the participation of anyone falling outside that identity. Even on an individual basis, the implications of membership of one or other of the antagonistic racial blocs in South African society could not be counteracted: "in the ultimate analysis no white person can escape being part of the oppressor camp" (Biko, 1979: 23).

Following the Fanonian model of decolonisation, establishing the capacity to speak for yourself is attended by a dismissal of the intermediaries who claimed to speak for you (Jameson: 1988: 181). It is not surprising therefore that Black Consciousness had the effect of drastically reducing the available space of feasible or productive political activity for white intellectuals. In the enforced absence of the liberation movements, liberalism occupied the centre stage of

oppositional politics, playing out a self-written role of defender of the defenceless black population (Fatton, 1986: 63).²¹ Untroubled by any significant competition, liberalism had, in spite of its failure to make political headway, managed to win over an important segment of elite black opinion to its project of racial integration (Rich, 1984b: 123). In addition, it had established a degree of hegemony over oppositional intellectual and cultural production. However, the rise of Black Consciousness gained much of its initial momentum from widespread disillusionment with the liberatory pretensions of largely-ritualistic liberal politics (Stadler, 1987: 171). The Movement's efforts at setting up cultural mechanisms and institutions aimed at promulgating its ideology presented a direct challenge to the control of the liberal establishment.

v

Something of the content of that challenge and its disturbance of the complacent stability of the oppositional cultural sphere, can be extrapolated from Gordimer's Academic Freedom address to the University of Natal in 1971: "Speak out: the necessity for protest" (1988: 73-86).

Perhaps the most telling context to Gordimer's address is provided by its occasion: the annual Academic Freedom Lecture²² of a liberal university. The image projected by the liberal universities as islands of political principle and opposition was, at the time of Gordimer's address, under attack from two quarters. The ongoing harassment by the state had recently intensified as a result of widespread protest on white campuses over the Mafeje affair in 1968 (1988: 77; cf Hirson, 1979: 65-8). A second challenge came from the ascendant Black Consciousness movement. The Black Consciousness-influenced student organisation, SASO, had, shortly after its

formation in 1969, disassociated itself from the nominally-multiracial but effectively white-dominated liberal student organisation, NUSAS (Hirson, 1979: 65-73).

The burden of Gordimer's speech was a defence of the value of protest at a time and in a situation where only sustained disruptive or violent forms of oppositional action seemed to stand any chance of moving the state or bringing about any change to the status quo. Gordimer maintains the "necessity" of speaking out in defence of freedom in a place and time where freedom had been shown itself to be "almost infinitely divisible", apportioned unequally along racial lines (1988: 74). However, as Gordimer herself realises, there is little material evidence to underwrite her claim for the necessity and efficacy of non-violent protest. Against the cynical use of power by the State, the range of oppositional tactics which Gordimer is able to endorse is seemingly despairingly limited and of questionable effectiveness: "students ... have declared themselves unequivocally against all forms of racial discrimination. They have marched, sat-in, picketed, held forums and seminars, spoken and written on many issues ..." (1988: 77). The principles of protest, rooted in liberal presumptions of the inherent rationality of the body politic ("'protest' implies acceptance of an ear of authority and power to hear and take heed" [1988: 78]), seemed hardly tenable in the face of the violent intransigence of the state. The moment of non-violence had, it seemed, passed, and the historical landmarks of its recession are mentioned by Gordimer: the bloody end of the Defiance Campaign at Sharpeville, the banning of the ANC and PAC, the implementation of a network of laws designed to stifle any effective opposition (76-7).

The range of practices available to non-violent opposition had been drastically circumscribed by a plethora of laws designed to outlaw and criminalise such activities, making any but the most symbolic opposition to the state illegal. For Gordimer, the injustice

of this position necessitates the abandoning of the concept of rule of law which governs liberal political morality. In its place, the authority for permissible oppositional activity becomes "the unwritten charter that exists inside you and me just as surely as the mechanism that keeps us balanced on our two feet" (76). This "unwritten charter" is associated with nature: the absence of freedom runs counter to the needs and demands of the body, and, in response to the body's promptings, it will be rejected. "That sick taste at the back of the throat is protest," claims Gordimer, "the protest of an organism at what it knows it shouldn't, can't stomach without harm" (74). The "unwritten charter" thus has origins outside the contingent realm of the political. Its impulses and directions are felt rather than intuited, located in "the deepest source of collective knowledge and experience" (77).

Protest, Gordimer asserts, has a vital cognitive function: "If student protest were to achieve nothing but this, the shock of recognition of things as they really are, affecting the daily lives of real, flesh-and-blood people, instead of rows of statistics or incomprehensible clauses in a statute book, or strange abstractions like 'Other Coloured' or 'Surplus people'--if protest were to achieve nothing else, it still would be performing an absolutely vital function in our society" (1988: 80). For Gordimer, the statutory manifestations of apartheid are grotesque contrivances, "incomprehensible". Apartheid is a use of language turned against nature, a cynical "abstraction" from the real. The task of protest is thus to expose the fleshed reality that underlies the written contrivances of the apartheid system. Protest is allied, in this way, to the bodily and natural directions of the "unwritten charter". Apartheid is distanced from that natural order by the obfuscations of its written categories. Protest--essentially symbolic political action, the "demonstration" of political opposition--is designed to

awake the sense of the real in a cowed social subjectivity. Protest draws attention to a natural and imminent "flesh-and-blood" reality beneath apartheid's obfuscations. It is therefore appropriate that Gordimer valorises an unwritten charter: its sovereignty and self-evident truth contrasted with written law which can be unscrupulously written to restrict freedom.

This formulation of the political impact of the act of bringing to consciousness, serves also as the grounding for an assertion of the necessity and form of a politicised culture: "So you can see that there is something to be said for my fellow novelist Günter Grass's choice of a crowing cock as the symbol of what's needed in a society burdened with the legacy of a shameful past--as his and ours is--and (in our case) a not less shameful present" (80). The crowing cock of fiction will serve to wake up consciences dulled by repression and ideological obfuscation: "We shall need to see our efforts not so much as attempts to right wrongs on behalf of the blacks, as to set society free of the lies upon which it is built" (84). Literature is allied to protest which in turn is allied to the bodily promptings of political morality: the unwritten code.

But Gordimer's metaphorisation of the incompatibility of apartheid with good health and as a form of language turned against nature tends to detract from her defence of the necessary cognitive function of protest and committed literature. While protest could speak the ill-health of South African society, it was itself powerless to heal it. That power belongs instead to the organisations of the Black Consciousness. Gordimer defines Black Consciousness as analogous to the Négritude movement and "defined most simply as black cultural nationalism" (82). Gordimer suggests that, although the historical moment of Négritude itself has passed ("rather old hat, now" [82]), there were cogent reasons why blacks in South Africa were "rediscovering" the idea. Blackness is the singular and overbearing

burden of individual life in South Africa, the principal and visible determinant of social existence and destiny: "It is to blame for all one endures" (82). Apartheid effects in its victims a crisis of identity, a "shame of being black" (82), requiring a countervailing assertion of the positive essence of blackness in order to combat it: "one can see how négritude, the prideful assertion of blackness as a positive value, is the only antidote to this spiritual sickness" (83). The black oppressed had found a means to heal the bodily damage caused by apartheid's toxicity. That means lay in the rejection not only of the oppressions inflicted by white rule, but in liberal attempts to ameliorate the harshness of that rule.

A key criticism of liberalism in the early writing of Black Consciousness was aimed at what Gordimer terms "attempts to right wrongs on behalf of blacks", and particularly at the presumption that such representations entailed: that blacks were incapable of representing themselves. According to Biko, the rejection of NUSAS was necessitated by the symbolic and circumscribed nature of its multiracialism:

What we want is not black visibility but real black participation. In other words it does not help us to see several quiet black faces in a multiracial student gathering which ultimately concentrates on what the white students believe are the needs for the black students. (1979: 5)

Equally, as a later SASO document revealed, the appeal of Black Consciousness for black students was a measure of the failure of liberal politics to deliver any visible results: "It might be more effective to go it alone instead of standing piously on ineffective platforms, issuing impotent fulminations against 'the system'" (quoted in Fatton, 1986: 69). Gordimer registers the impact of both of these criticisms:

The sin for which retribution is now falling on [liberals'] heads from all sides was the sin of failure. The upholders of white supremacy, whether they called it baaskap or white-leadership-

with-justice, never really offered the black man anything more than a handout. The radical liberals offered everything, and were powerless to give anything. Even the worth of personal friendships that were formed between black and white, out of affinity, not patronage, became soured by this circumstance. Against the cold measure of the need of our historical situation, the liberals with small or large "L" failed twice over; first, to gain a following where political power existed, among whites; second by inevitably falling into the role of acting proxy for black aspirations. Nosipho Majeke defined it the way blacks have to see it, rather differently, as "the role of the liberal as the conciliator between oppressor and oppressed". (1988: 83)

The blurring of the individual ethical distinctions that Gordimer scrupulously sets out here (between "liberals" and "Liberals", "patronage" and affinity"), mirrors the identitarian logic of the Black Consciousness attack on the uniform implication of all whites in the institution of white power: "Whether we like it or not, whether we support or oppose apartheid, we whites belong by virtue of our faces to white power" (84). At this point of her argument it becomes clear that Gordimer's address is to whites, and that despite her attempts to provide reassurances of the necessity and value of white protest activity, this activity finds itself with no clear area of competence in comparison with the effective, healing role played by blacks:

If you students are to go on speaking out, it will on behalf of yourselves, and that part of yourselves which exists tangled inextricably in human interdependence with the lives of those you live among, whether or not on the surface of the skin it is their turn to reject you. You will affirm your right and desperate need to protest against the hurt and injustice done in your midst, not because you are white but because you are human. (1988: 84)

The general tenor of Gordimer's reaction to the criticisms of Black Consciousness is of a recognition of their comprehensibility: "one can well see why the blacks of South Africa are rediscovering négritude, if somewhat late, why they need to discover négritude" (82). Unable to defend liberal practices of representation, Gordimer is compelled to reject them, and to confront the absence of any

available alternative: "If those of us who are outraged by and prepared to take responsibility for the injustices of our society must relinquish the role of proctor, what is left to us?" (84). Gordimer admits that she has no answer to this question beyond reasserting the need of protest.

In the next chapter I will discuss the literary materialisation of Gordimer's rejection of liberalism, and her consequent attempts to find a practice of writing that is not implicated in the maintenance of white domination. Gordimer distances herself from the literary embodiment of the liberal ideology--a "tradition" of South African literature, and the institutions that mark it out, publicise, defend and disseminate it--on the grounds of its coloniality. However, her attempts to join an alternative "tradition" of African writing are frustrated by the same exclusionary logic of Black Consciousness she confronts in her Academic Freedom address. Gordimer, like revisionist intellectuals in general, confronts a crisis of once-stable representative practices and mechanisms, which, having been rejected by the represented themselves and ignored by the state to whom they were addressed, can no longer be considered effective or ethical.

THREE

I

Literary studies and literary production in general sees similar efforts to those made by revisionists in other fields to re-evaluate established paradigms and reconstruct their discipline. These efforts follow upon a new-found theoretical self-consciousness, in part the result of critiques of established practices of knowledge mounted by groups of people formerly the uncomplaining objects of enquiry and representation. Following the pattern of revisionist activity in other fields, the new white writing, in response to the crisis of the colonial order, calls into question the literary tradition associated with that order. Literary revisionism is a re-writing of the tradition, not only on the level of content (taking as its object the colonial moment and its continued replication in contemporary social life); but, on another level, critically concerned with the colonial implications of the very raw materials, processes and social function of writing itself. In the case of English-speaking writers and critics, it is a literary institution and tradition long dominated by the South African variant of the ideology of liberalism that becomes the object of revision.

English liberalism developed within Britain's ascendant bourgeois society during the nineteenth century and was globally disseminated by imperialism. The ideology became established in the Cape Colony in the late nineteenth century in response to changes in the nature and scale of agricultural activity in the territory (Trapido, 1980: 249). The subsequent fortunes of the South African variant of this ideology follow those of the class fraction whose interests it expresses: a

history of growing cultural marginality, political powerlessness and defeat. The liberal ideology, rooted in the agrarian world-view of the British ruling-class, failed to keep pace with the pressures of advancing industrialisation in twentieth-century South Africa (Trapido, 1980: 268). Its prominence as an ideology of social control declined in the face of a competing ideology of settler segregationism, which sought to defend a unified white state against the encroachments of black urbanisation and proletarianisation (Rich, 1984b: 123).

Nevertheless, the ideology came to exercise an influence on South African culture which far exceeded any political influence it may have had. The years before 1970 saw the dominance of liberalism in the narrow field of white opposition politics and in oppositional intellectual production, a dominance that began to decline only with the repression following the Sharpeville massacre. The subsequent phase of repression and armed struggle effectively shut down the narrow space of parliamentary democracy within which political liberalism had operated (Rich, 1984b; Vaughan: 1982, 119). Thus deprived of a political base, liberal practice retreated to the universities, from where it played out a largely gestural political role and occupied itself with the defence of its intellectual domain.

Liberalism is generally defined in terms of its distinction from theories of the social determination of thought and political reality. In its incarnation as a "doctrine of possessive individualism" (Williams, 1976: 181), the ideology has specific applications to the South African situation. In the sphere of political economy it served to sever conceptually the phenomenon of racial domination from the logic of the economy. Indeed, it was argued, apartheid was an illogical and essentially peripheral phenomenon, retarding the libertarian impulses of the economy; the retention of racial structures in South African society was the result of dogmatic and

obsessive Afrikaner religious and nationalist ideologies. In the liberal view of history the apartheid state was a parenthesis in the logical evolution of South African society towards democracy. Effectively, "left to its own devices" the imperatives toward freedom of the economic would necessitate the withering-away of apartheid (Wolpe, 1988: 26). Accordingly, the ideology translates into the sphere of the political as a doctrine of essential quiescence and non-intervention, of the underlying and beneficent rationality of the economic order temporarily obscured by the pathological phenomenon of apartheid.

One of the most tenacious and well-defended of liberalism's strongholds has been in the English literary field. The literary tradition associated with liberalism found itself increasingly culturally marginalised following the entrenchment of segregationist ideology at Union in 1910, and, as a consequence, follows liberalism into its academic enclave. The mirror-image of the tradition's exile to the narrow reaches of high culture, is the unchallenged popularity of the supremacist wish-fulfillments of the colonial romance, the aesthetic cognate of segregationism and white hegemonism (Rich, 1984a.: 372-3).²³ Liberalism's control over the institutions controlling the definition, production and reception of "serious" South African literature is the result of a complex of practices made possible by the dominance of the liberal ideology in the English-language cultural formation: the English-language press, publishers and universities. These institutions disseminated a literary-critical practice grounded upon liberal-humanist paradigms imported from Britain (which remained the cultural metropole of South African English-language culture). Liberal literary-critical and pedagogic practices ensured in turn the replication of liberal aesthetic values in the fiction produced by the writers educated, published and publicised by these institutions (Ryan, 1990: 1-8). This dominance

over the definition, publication and reception of literature allowed the liberal academy to create a normative canon of English and South African literature. While it is axiomatic that the formation of any canon is the result of a process of interested selection, the concessive admission of South African literature into a localised canon dominated by a "broadly Leavisite set of texts" of English literature (Ryan, 1990: 8), produces an extraordinarily discriminatory selection:

It excludes, for example, all pre-nineteenth-century writing, the most notable exception being oral literature. It ignores all working-class literature, both African and Afrikaans, and it shuns large chunks of white popular literature with vehemence. In total, then, this "tradition" which claims to represent South African Literature, quite staggeringly ignores the culture and literary endeavours of the majority of people in this country. (Hofmeyer, 1979: 39-40)

The basis for such a selection and the interests it serves can be deduced from the fact that the canon of South African literature "consists largely of texts which satisfy (or can be forced to satisfy) the demands of the humanist-colonial and Leavisite critical agendas" (Ryan, 1990: 8).

As Ryan's remarks indicate, the liberal dominance of the literary academy saw the defence of a literary aesthetic grounded in the cardinal precepts of liberal ideology. The ideology translates into a literary aesthetic grounded upon notions of the fundamental truth underpinning human interactions, however obscured they may be by the social. Vaughan has outlined the formal extensions of the liberal literary aesthetic: human relations, being essentially rational, are hence held to be "self-correcting" (1982b: 120); the task of the liberal writer is then to uncover the capacity for human dialogue and healing interaction which lies beneath the surface obfuscations of the historical, political and social. The liberal belief in the

ontological certainty lying beneath the surface of transitory phenomena makes for an essentially realist aesthetic:

If individuals hold potential mastery over the real world, it follows that a fiction which is concerned to promote this mastery must set an example in its own domain. Reality must be mastered, rendered amenable in every facet. This implies an ideal of transparency--of absolute clarity. Liberal fiction aims at clarity, ease and concreteness of exposition. (Vaughan, 1982b: 120)

Moreover, the liberal aesthetic is grounded upon a binary opposition between self and society, with a powerful valorisation falling upon the first of these, subtending a belief in the immutability of the individual human being as the fundamental indivisible unit of the social order. Thus, in Gordimer's novel A World of Strangers (1958), the Englishman Toby Hood is shown to develop from a culpable disconnectedness from either segment of the divided society he uncomfortably inhabits towards the assumption of what Clingman terms a "social commitment" towards healing the artificial rift between the black and white world. This commitment takes the Forsterian form of interpersonal connection, illustrative of Gordimer's projected resolution of the conflict in the liberal concept of synthesising multi-racialism (Clingman, 1986: 55-7).

But behind the proclaimed "neutrality" of liberal-realism is a culture accustomed to the unchallenged exercise of its authority, believing itself capable of a disinterested and accurate representation of reality and the lives and aspirations of people and communities wholly unlike its own. Said has pointed out the close fit between empiricism and imperialism, drawing attention to the material interests sanctioning the confident exercise of the power to represent. "Gaining and holding an imperium", he notes, "means gaining and holding a domain, which includes a variety of operations, among them constituting an area, accumulating its inhabitants, having power over its ideas, people, and of course, its land, converting

people, land and ideas to the purposes and for the use of a hegemonic imperial design; all this as a result of being able to treat reality appropriatively" (1979: 72). For Said, the power of certain representations to attract to themselves the value of truth is an index of the cultural strength enabling them. In turn, that cultural strength is underwritten by the material mechanisms of political and cultural power (Said, 1978: 12). The disturbances in the order of representation that are registered in the white writing of the 1970s are then signs of a disordering of the culture underlying it, and of the mechanisms of white power that, in the end, guaranteed liberalism its hegemonic status as oppositional discourse.

The baleful hold of the liberal-realist tradition over the production and study of literature in South Africa is demonstrated in the course of attempts made during the 1970s to revise, or, to use Attwell's term, "re-narrativise" it (1990: 123). In this chapter, I will deal with three instances of literary revisionism which take as their point of departure the South African literary-critical institution and the canon it defends. First, I will consider Mike Kirkwood's polemical intervention in an otherwise unremarkable national poetry conference in 1974. Second, I will examine the shifting valencies of Gordimer's evaluation of the central ancestor-text of the South African tradition--Schreiner's The Story of an African Farm (1883). Third, I will consider JM Coetzee's deconstructive inhabitation, in his novels of the 1970s, of the central genres of South African literature.

II

Attwell locates an early manifestation of revisionism within the institution of South African literary criticism in Kirkwood's critique of "Butlerism", delivered at the "Poetry '74" conference held at the

University of Cape Town Summer School.²⁴ In his paper, "The colonizer: a critique of the English South African culture theory", Kirkwood challenged conceptions of the history, identity and cultural function of the English speaking fraction of the South African population, derived from the liberal ideology, and embodied in the magisterial presence and pronouncements of Guy Butler. The "Butlerist" perspective "looked back to the arrival of the 1820 settlers in the spirit of mission, in that the particular historical role of the English was thought to be an enlightening, humanizing one in a frontier society of harshly contending ideologies" (Attwell, 1990: 123-4). From this position between the forces in contention, Butler could write out an salvational mission for English-language culture: "the English were to be the 'mediators', facilitating the emergence of a more humane national culture and polity" (Attwell, 1990: 124).

But rather than finding themselves in the middle, Kirkwood argues, English-speaking South Africans were in fact at the top, co-participants with Afrikaners in maintaining the repressive edifice of white power. Kirkwood's analysis of the social position of the white English-speaking fraction of the population draws on the main themes of revisionism:

It is clear that in sociological terms we are of the White majority, the dominant group. Our political opposition to the evolution of apartheid since 1948, whether voiced by the United Party or the Progressive Party, is limited by a discussion of the tactics through which domination is to be perpetuated. The racial oligarchy which is the political expression of our culture is not the creation of the Afrikaner alone. Our mining interests and our industries created the system of cheap contractual and migrant labour, and our White working-class demanded, and got, a privileged stake in the maintenance of a prosperity dependent on that labour. (1974: 108)

Kirkwood's principal source here is a key text of early revisionist political economy: Heribert Adam's Modernizing Racial Domination

(1971). A central theme of Adam's book is that, rather than a species of atavism or neo-religious obsession, apartheid is an finely-honed instrument of class rule, distributing the considerable benefits of racial-capitalism fairly evenly among the two segments of the white population. Attempts to partially deracialise the disposition of domination and privilege by admitting selected blacks into the middle-class amounted, in Adam's analysis, to no more than a necessary "modernization" of the generally efficient system of racial capitalist exploitation. The effect of Adam's analysis, for Kirkwood, is to deprive Butler's theorisation--of a principled and humane English population, bent on the cultural amelioration of social conflict--of any sociopolitical foundation. Accordingly, Butler's thesis is a ideological production, a matter of "bad faith" and the "self-inflating false-consciousness of the colonizer" (1974: 104, 106), effectively endorsing the neocolonial project of disguised domination.

However, according to Kirkwood, there is more to Butlerism than a mere rehearsal of the justificatory narrative of a mission civilatrice. Like other forms of colonial discourse, Butlerism is as much concerned with the project of consolidating the self as it is with undermining the other. Butler is, in Kirkwood's analysis, involved in an exercise in damage-limitation and reconstruction, attempting to reinvigorate English cultural activity against what he perceives as a "crisis of identity" suffered by English-speaking whites. This crisis, claims Kirkwood, whatever Butler's mystificatory interpretation of it may be, is in fact a symptom of liberal political marginality:

The so-called identity crisis of the English which may be dated from the declaration of the White Man's Republic and the suppression of the internal Black freedom movement before and after Sharpeville, is perhaps better understood as a reaction, accompanied by the mild shock of a belated recognition, to the facts of Afrikaner victory within the White camp and the political, if not economic, decolonization of Africa to the north (1974: 111)

Butler's construction of a strong role for the English as mediators between Afrikaans and black interests is thus a mode of compensation for the passage of political events that have rendered them effectively impotent.

Butler's remedy for the perceived "crisis of identity" of English-speaking South Africans is an indigenisation of their culture, followed by a mobilisation of its humanising values in the project of national reconciliation. According to the organic metaphor which usually describes this process, white settlers brought with them from the European motherland the embryo of their culture. Since then it has grown, acquired a life of its own, adapted to the rigours and pressures of the local. For Butler then, South African English should no longer be seen to emanate from a British source valorised as central and definitive, nor should British national culture be seen as a grand model for younger varieties of that culture to aspire to. Yet, for Kirkwood, the embryonic history detailed in Butler's analysis conceals a phylogenetic history, the long document of barbarism detailing the ineradicable connections of the local with the global fortunes of imperialism. Thus a South African literary culture can neither disconnect itself from its origins, nor any longer unproblematically absolve itself of responsibility by claiming to act as a child of the parent culture. "[W]hat Professor Butler calls 'the indigenous bug'", remarks Kirkwood, "should not be treated as a South African variety of a universal phenomenon, and we argue further that these relationships with 'local colour' are mediated through various facets of the 'colonizer' role which characterizes the cultural life of the English South African" (1974: 109). For Kirkwood, the English-language cultural heritage, compromised by its associations with colonisation, cannot be reactivated as a source of value and identity.

Whereas Butler's response to political marginality and disturbances to the social order upon which his colonialist world-view

is structured is to propose an Arnoldian project of cultural resuscitation predicated upon the unrevised terms of that world-view, Kirkwood is concerned to reject the project of reassembly or repair of the colonial order and its literary manifestations. Kirkwood instead embarks on a three-stage characterisation of colonialist discourse, rewriting, as Attwell points out,

the three phases identified by Fanon in the development of the national culture of indigenous peoples, namely assimilation into the colonial culture, followed by reaction and immersion in the indigenous culture, followed by revolutionary commitment, from the point of view of the colonizer, who finds himself, as settler, having witnessed and lived through, if not in living memory then in folklore, all three phases, with the effect that he grows in self-awareness as he observes himself being posited as the object of the emergent discourse of the colonized. (1990: 125).

Having reached the third historical stage, Kirkwood argues, the colonizer must confront the fact that "the initiative passes to the colonized", leaving the colonizer adrift without the stabilising influence formerly provided by the presence of the colonized as subservient other (1974: 122). The role of the colonizer during this stage of decolonisation is, for the first time in colonial history, a passive one: "It becomes possible to give a preliminary, and short, answer to the question: 'When does a colonizer stop being a colonizer?'--It is, of course: 'When a colonized stops being a colonized' (123).

Kirkwood proceeds to account for the coloniality of contemporary South African society, arguing that a national colonizing group has emerged from the anti-imperialist struggles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century:

in the years since the Act of Union this colonizer group has achieved a formidable freedom from external imperialist manipulation and has in the process forged a strong internal alliance. It now practices colonialism in one country: there is a rich, White South Africa, and a poor, Black South Africa. (1974: 124-5)

The internal-coloniality of the South African social formation leads Kirkwood to a qualification of the central revisionist thesis that the nature of political contention in South Africa is determined by the class interests and contradictions existing beneath the surface of racial distinctions. Whatever the deep reality of the South African situation, the central existential apprehension of that situation for Kirkwood is that it is colonial: "These [Marxist] truths seem to us somewhat abstract. ... The unity of interests which overrides class divisions within the Whites and translates racism into privilege creates the colonizer. Capitalism's racial divide, which forces down the salaries of professional Blacks and prevents the growth of a Black capitalist class except in isolated pockets, creates the colonized around the core of the cheap labour system" (125).

Accordingly, the principal target of black opposition in South Africa is not the rule of the bourgeoisie and the capitalist system, but white rule and the apartheid system. In the face of this attack, the ethical task imposed upon unwilling white colonizers is a recognition of their position as colonizers, and a vigilant inventorying of the traces of coloniality in their attitudes and orientation to their society, thereby attempting to free themselves of "all that colonizer lumber knocking about in our Apollonian craniums" (118). However, this recognition and refusal of the fact of colonialism does nothing to remove it. The enforced passivity of the ethical or "awakened" colonizer restricts any socially-transformative role to the negative one of self-decolonisation. While the role of the writer is that of furthering the project of "self-transcendence" in the ranks of the colonizers, Kirkwood makes clear that mere cultural activity will not be sufficient: "a life technique, as well as an art-technique, will be required" (132). While Kirkwood endorses a politicisation of cultural activity in the service of decolonisation, he seems to indicate that such activity is in itself

insufficient. Though he calls for a "life technique" to cultural activism (the term seemingly predicated upon the division between art and politics, or between the activities of individual reflection and collective transformative action), Kirkwood nevertheless fails to set out the possible parameters it could entail, his essay is accordingly restricted to the isolated and politically ineffectual activity of personal decolonisation.

III

For her part, Gordimer had set out an "inner history" of the declining fortunes of liberalism in her first three novels (Clingman, 1986: 6). The crisis of liberalism is charted in the desperately restricted terrain of opposition represented in The Late Bourgeois World (1966). Equally, the bleak neocoloniality of post-independent Africa within which A Guest of Honour (1971) is set, forecasts an unpromising future for a decolonised South Africa. In both these novels, Gordimer applies to the fictional events and actants a strongly realistic texture, the immediate historical events of the period are narrativised in terms of a view of history-as-process. The Lukácsian historicity of the novels--history as "dynamic and developmental" (Lukács, 1963: 19)--is at once the registering of the present historical impasse and a utopian insistence on a view of the passage of history as salvational, the inexorable laws of its motion promising deliverance in the long run. The strong historicity of the novels is thus a response to the contradiction between the dilemmas of historical position and the promises of historical process: "a ... realization ... that in the stilled world of the late 1960s anything approaching hopes of real social transformation had to be indefinitely postponed" (Clingman, 1986: 133). The aesthetic associated with an ideology of individual development and transcendence is buried in The

Conservationist, which sets off decisively in a new direction (Wade, 1978; Newman, 1988).

Gordimer's own new-found critical orientation towards the literary tradition with which she is associated can be demonstrated by an extract from The Conservationist.

A dinner with the Japanese or Germans or Canadians and their wives is part of the business schedule. They all have boats or summer places about which, as a change from base metals, it is protocol to talk over food and drink. - I'm not in the yacht-owning class, I'm afraid (it was charming of him to say). I have my bit of veld and my few cows. And that's all I want. -

In Africa! A farm in Africa! He must love Africa. And were there any wild animals there? (1974: 40)

Following Gaston Bachelard, Said argues that the bluntly positivistic category of space is given emotional or even rational significance by the operations of a kind of poetics, "whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here" (1978: 55). The poeticised or "imaginative" geographies that result from this process have the capacity to generate interest, and, in the case of imperialism, the capacity to justify the exercise of power in pursuit of that interest (Said, 1978: 55-8). The imaginative geography given ironic treatment in the passage quoted above is the exotic Africa that traces its archive to the heroic accounts and woodcut illustrations of the explorer-writers of the nineteenth century, the "principal producers of Africa for European imaginations-producers, that is, of ideology in connection with the European expansionist project there" (Pratt, 1985: 141). It is the Africa of the colonial romance, a substantial literary tradition stretching between Rider Haggard and Wilbur Smith, a compound of "images of women, sexuality, and penetration, with an older image of utopian space" (Bunn, 1988: 12). Equally, it is a vision that has been drawn upon by the tourism industry, commodified and marketed among a Western bourgeoisie who, in Fanon's contemptuous description, come to Africa

"as tourists avid for the exotic, for big-game hunting and casinos", for the "delicious depravities which their 'reserves' hold for them" (1967: 123, 124). It was against the wish-fulfilling appeal of such dream Africas²⁵ that Olive Schreiner, in the preface to the second edition of The Story of an African Farm, felt compelled to defend her achromatic representation--a staging of "the life we all lead" against a backdrop painted in the "grey pigments" of the Karroo landscape:

It has been suggested by a kind critic that he would better have liked the little book if it had been a history of wild adventure; of cattle driven into inaccessible "kranzes" by Bushmen; "of encounters with ravening lions, and hair-breadth escapes". This could not be. Such works are best written in Piccadilly or in the Strand; there the gifts of the creative imagination untrammelled by contact with any fact, may spread their wings.

But, should one sit down to paint the scenes among which has grown, he will find that the facts creep in upon him. Those brilliant phases and shapes which the imagination sees in far-off lands are not for him to portray. (Schreiner, 1975: 23-4)

In Schreiner's day, a sensationalistic image of South Africa had been lodged in the minds of a British readership by the sporadic news of the territory reaching them. This dealt for the most part with border wars, raids, punitive expeditions and the like. Equally, fictional accounts told tales of hunters, lions and fantastic savagery (Schoeman, 1989: 438). AE Voss suggests that the part-romance, part-training manual and publicity brochure aimed at prospective British settlers, Mrs M Carey-Hobson's The Farm in the Karroo (1883), is precisely the kind of lurid and unlikely account of South African farming life against which Schreiner set herself in her preface. Mrs Carey-Hobson, in her introduction to the book, shows herself to be well aware of her readers' taste for "exciting adventures and hair-breadth escapes" and "adventure among the snakes, elephants, tigers, and baboons of the great continent" (Voss, 1985: 6-10). Moreover, these adventures serve as a vehicle for the project of grounding capitalist agriculture at the Cape. As Rich has shown in an analysis

of Buchan's Prester John (1910), the tales of adventure and accumulation of the archetypal colonial romance are crucial ideological interventions in the unstable political and economic environment of the rapidly developing South Africa (1983; cf Rich, 1982: 57).

But Schreiner's representation of an African farm does not itself seem any more trammelled by the particularities of precapitalist settler agriculture than those of her competitors. Voss considers the torpor and absence of productivity of Schreiner's farm to be realistically justified on the basis of the stricken condition of Cape agriculture following the drought of 1862 and the general decline of the agricultural sector during the the period of the novel's action (1858-1867, the closing decade of the pre-industrial era in South Africa) (1985: 5; cf Voss, 1977). It may be countered that the absence in the novel of either the possibility or the memory of fruitful agricultural activity would tend to indicate the essentially symbolic nature of Schreiner's farm. Shadowed by the great changes outside its borders (the diggings and the railway: the representatives of the emergent industrial society in which Schreiner lived and wrote), the farm is an outpost of values and relationships soon to be obsolete. The passing of the quasi-feudal order of the Boer farms, its only virtue that of stability and a limited and racially-exclusive form of communalism, and the episodic appearance of the economic changes that would develop into full-blown industrialisation, brought with them the seeds of the subsequent erosion of the political power of Cape liberalism (Trapido, 1980). Schreiner's salvational project for the cruelty and inequality of the rising industrial order was Arnoldian: "nothing less than the production of a humane Anglophone literacy in its own authorial language as a counter to the deeply compromised status of that same articulacy in the speech and writing of the colonial power" (Pechey, 1983: 75). The novel, written between

1876 and 1883, is thus a "political act, a timely intervention in the history from which it springs and to which it speaks" (Pechey, 1983: 75).

Accordingly, Coetzee argues that the farm should be taken to be a correlative of the idleness and depthlessness of colonial society that Schreiner seeks to criticise, rather than as the product of a realistic description of farming life (1988: 64-6). And, rather than the unadorned transcription of a readable topography, the landscape of the novel is a representation of a "site of wholesale absence" (Coetzee, 1988: 64). Such a landscape symbolizes the unthought or the chaotic, a variant of the venerable literary figure of the wilderness beyond the ratio of the factual world.

But in spite of its opportunistically-selective representation of the actualities of its setting, Schreiner's novel has, in the process of canon-formation, been apotheosised as the ancestor-text of the realist literary tradition in South Africa--a line traced via Paton, Plomer and Smith, terminating or originating at Schreiner (Gray, 1979: ch6). Given that Gordimer is frequently taken to be at the end of the liberal-realist line, it is interesting to note a significant revision of her attitude towards the continuist narrative²⁴ of the South African literary tradition in general, and in particular to its mythic point of origin, Schreiner's African Farm. Gordimer shifts from her earlier and conventional valuation of African Farm as monumental, to a critical orientation in respect of the novel's coloniality. Gordimer's early response is along the same lines as the purposive use of the novel by the liberal literary-critical institution. Her revised response--involving a consideration of what liberal literary critics generally ignored in the novel: its historical and political situation, and its involvement in that situation--indicates the considerable distance that has opened between Gordimer and the liberal institution and its practices.

It is significant that, for Gordimer, the inadequacies of the narrative of literary tradition lie in its hitherto-unadmitted coloniality and that this consciousness that South African literary history is a colonial history raises a series of formal and aesthetic challenges. In the essay "The novel and the nation in South Africa" (1961), Gordimer described her cultural situation in terms recognisable as those of the so-called "cultural cringe"--an apology for, or impatience with the local that is the product of habits of deference to a metropolitan culture considered to be older and better (Gunew, 1990: 103). Accordingly, Gordimer describes the local cultural texture as "pitifully thin" (1973a: 36) or "watery" (45), particularly when compared to that of the "great general cultural tradition" of France (37). Attendant upon this cultural poverty is an anxiety about the absence of an organic national identity; South Africa is a mere "technological collectivity" without the bonds of community, simply thrown into being. Gordimer argues that, since community is impossible in the balkanised social territory of South Africa and it is the existence of community that gives body to culture, South African literature has no "substance" on which to draw: "it is out of a culture, from which man's inner being is enriched as the substance in an integrated community grows fuller, that a literature draws its real sustenance in the long run" (1973a: 36). The metaphors of cultural "substance" and of "cultural thinness" turn upon a logic of depth or depthlessness, a logic that in turn informs Gordimer's notion of the novelistic ideal as the "enrichment of man's inner being", or her description of "a real novelist, one who has struggled with the strangeness of life, reached into the unexplored borders of the imagination and taken us into the territory he has marked out of the unknown" (1973a: 38). The depthlessness of a social collectivity that is without community and that is marked only by difference and division stunts the production of literature, defined

by its depth of insight, its exploration of the inner and invisible: "the novel-in-depth--what one might call the 'pure' novel of the imagination--cannot be expected to flourish in Africa yet. We are still at the stage of trying to read ourselves by outward signs" (1973a: 37). The specific pressures of living in such a society further generate a sense of confinement in the present; the obsession of South African writing with the here and now in turn attests to the overbearing presence of the "social and political problems" of the place (1973a: 49). These obsessions limit the scope of South African literary questioning to familiar variations on race-haunted themes: Millin's God's Stepchildren prompts the question whether as banal an event as a mixed marriage could occasion a deeply-felt sense of tragedy anywhere but in South Africa: "at what a curious disadvantage it must put South African with the peoples of other nations, whose writers are concerned with man's survival and the meaning of his life on earth" (1973a: 41). It is not surprising then that Gordimer's sense of the oppressivity of the South African context generates the near-carceral description of what lies beyond the national borders as the "outside world" (1973a: 37); while nationally "[a] sense of space seems to have oppressed us in our souls as well as in our bodies; we have shut ourselves in" (39). The vocation of the novel, to conduct an inner search for the unbounded, is militated against by the absence, or thinness, of the inner in South Africa.

Viewed from such a restrictive context, it is not surprising that the value of Schreiner's African Farm for Gordimer lies in its universality: "The eye of Olive Schreiner's consciousness opens on a Karroo farm in the 1870s but it takes us away to nothing more limited than the mystery of life itself" (1973a: 49). The novel refuses to be incarcerated within its immediate historical and geographical context, thereby becoming something which the writers and readers of the present, submerged in their own situation, can treat both as origin

and ideal: "The Story of an African Farm ... is not something over and done with; it is instead the sort of novel we can hope is to come" (1973a: 49). In its refusal to be confined by its immediate social reality the novel gestures towards "the great and ineluctable", and thereby merits the highest literary status rather than the attracting only the inferior status accorded to works with local content: "The Story of an African Farm is always there to remind South Africans that though they may have changed and shaped themselves according to the laws and ideals within their particular situation, and though their novel does and of necessity must concern itself with making sense of what has happened to them, they have not contracted out of the wider human condition" (1973a: 50).

The conception of literary tradition Gordimer employs here approaches that outlined in TS Eliot's essay "Tradition and the individual talent" (1919). Tradition, for Eliot, is an order of literary monuments only contingently implicated in history, transcending any geographical limitations (though, in the end, unadmittedly Eurocentric): "[Tradition] involves ... the historical sense ... and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and with it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order" (1975: 38). As Bhabha points out, such a conception of literary tradition depends on the transhistorical and transgeographical stability of systems of perception and value, and thus "on a pre-given Transcendental subject, which functions as both origin and end, guaranteeing discursive coherence" (1984: 106). Writing in the wake of the Sharpeville massacre and the bannings of the mass-based political organisations, in the year of the severing of symbolic ties to the Empire upon

achievement of the aim of Afrikaner nationalism of an independent and isolated state, Gordimer is able to find compensation in the notion of a local literary tradition able, against the odds, to ground enduring literary value in the thin cultural soil of South Africa. In the face of growing cultural isolation the South African English writer can find comfort in what has been achieved out of similar isolation.

Fifteen years later, in the essay "English-language literature and politics" (1976), Gordimer would write of the novel, upon "reading it again", that what had once appeared to be strength was in fact limitation; the novel's attempt to reach beyond the limitations of its present moment amounted to an overlaying of colonial angst upon the topography of Africa: "in the final analysis this is a book that expresses the wonder and horror of the wilderness, and for the indigenous inhabitant that wilderness is home. The novel exists squarely within the political context of colonialism" (1976: 103). Gordimer consigns the novel that she had seen as capable of giving expression to the search for existential significance "being lived through by many young Africans in the black townships today" (1973a: 49), to the restrictions entailed by its coloniality: "I have never met a black who has read it ... Certainly no black could ever have written African Farm" (1976: 103). By thus accepting the fact of the racial division of literature, Gordimer must abandon the narrative of literary tradition as universal and compensatory. No longer the heart of a heartless world, the literary process is caught up in the social divisions of apartheid society: "any writer's attempt to present in South Africa a totality of human experience within his own country is subverted before he sets down a word" (1976: 118).

Clearly, for Gordimer, the liberal-realist literary tradition had by the early seventies come to be tainted by its association with dominative colonial systems of representation. Schreiner's novel, once monumental, is discredited by its part in the process of

inscription of European forms upon the territory and inhabitants of Africa. What had been presented as "fact" now appeared to be nothing other than a construction of colonial ideology, serving colonial interests.

This consciousness of coloniality necessitates the relinquishing of the liberal tradition's unproblematic orientation towards language and form. Where Schreiner had proposed painting what lay before her in preference to the imaginary landscapes of colonial romance, Gordimer came to view the corrective brushstrokes and "grey pigments" themselves as objects of suspicion: "politics, in the form of an agent of European Imperialism--the Dutch East India Company--brought the written word to this part of Africa; politics in the form of European missionaries who spread, along with their Protestantism or Catholicism, the political influence of their countries of origin, led to the very first transposition of the indigenous oral literature to the written word" (1976: 99). Spivak describes as "epistemic violence" the imposition of Western systems of intelligibility and subjectivity upon the indigenous, operating by first silencing the indigenous subject then teaching it to speak: "the epistemic violence that constituted/effaced a subject that was obliged to cathect (occupy in response to a desire) the space of the Imperialists' self-consolidating other" (Spivak, 1988: 209). Ideal-typical colonialism imposes its own forms of knowledge upon its subjects, representing this knowledge as universal, as the only possible and truthful way of seeing the world. The mathematical sense of Gordimer's term "transposition", that of a change of valence, encapsulates the process whereby the arrival of writing brings with it the negation of autochthonous subjectivity and culture, which become visible only through the superimposed grid of Western linguistic and formal structures. In this way, language and linguistic forms of representation are seen to be inextricably connected to the

territorialising processes of colonialism. Again following Spivak, an analogy may be drawn between the processes whereby colonial raw material is made available to Western positivism and colonial control and the processes of textuality: "As far as I understand it, the notion of textuality should be related to the notion of the worlding of a world on a supposedly unscribed territory. When I say this, I am thinking basically about the imperialist project which had to assume that the earth it territorialised was in fact previously unscribed. So then a world, on a simple level of cartography, inscribed what was presumed to be unscribed. Now this worlding is also a texting, textualising, a making into art, a making into an object to be understood." (Spivak, 1990: 1). Thus colonial knowledge does not remain applied to the colony and its inhabitants as mere objects. Instead it is transferred to the colony and its inhabitants and put to work there (Noyes, 1990). The knowledge the earliest colonisers acquired and wrote into their maps and their histories would be the knowledge in which the colonial machinery would instruct its subjects. Colonial knowledge became a mode of subjectivity, a way for the colonial subject of seeing the world, of imagining its place in it. The early colonisers were to transfer to the objects of their gaze (the surface of the territory, the native Other) a whole "mode of vision, a manner of constructing not only the seen world, but also oneself as the viewer" (Noyes 1990, 5).

This abstract account of the denegation of colonised subjectivity indicates the extent to which the liberal humanist project-- essentially that of an amelioration of social inequity principally through the instrument of dialogue aimed at the correction of individual psychological attitudes (Vaughan, 1982b.: 120)--cannot be maintained in the face of the deformation of subjectivity and communicational possibility inflicted by colonialism.²⁷

What Gordimer confronts in her distancing from the liberal tradition represented by Schreiner is the realisation that no literary form is without history, and that in South Africa that history is one of colonial domination.²⁰ With this realisation comes the question of the complicity of literature in the processes of domination:

Olive Schreiner's conscience was to reject colonialism, and her creative imagination to disappear in the sands of liberal pamphleteering, many years later. Perhaps she would have written no more imaginative work, anyway. But perhaps she took the conscious decision that Jean-Paul Sartre, in the context of the Pan-African struggle, has said any writer should make--to stop writing if he is needed to do any other task that, as he sees it, his country requires of him. It is certain that political pressures, in the form of a deep sense of injustice and inhumanity existing within their society, can cause certain writers to question the luxury value of writing at all, within a country like South Africa. (1976: 103)

The South African situation gives heightened visibility to the class divisions within cultural activity, "lay[ing] bare the class privileges and the leisure which it presupposes for its enjoyment" (Jameson, 1971: 161). The overlap between race and class in South Africa means that white writing is condemned to be bourgeois writing: "The white writer, aseptically quarantined in his test-tube élite existence, is cut off by enforced privilege from the greater part of the society in which he lives; the life of the proletariat, the 19 million whose potential of experience he does not share, from the day he is born baas to the day he is buried in his segregated cemetery" (Gordimer, 1976: 118). In a revision of her earlier valorisation of the "inner" or subjective as the specialised realm of aesthetic value, Gordimer now confronts the association of the "inner" with private luxury and gratification, and with racial and class guilt. What had earlier appeared to be a turning inward in search of the universal, now appeared to be little more than a flight from unpalatable reality to the haven of the inner. The contradiction between the supposed universality or liberatory value of art and its commodification and

distribution in a class society, is further exacerbated in the colonial situation, where art or literature must confront the ineradicable signs of its origins in an imposed culture and its complicity with the overall project of colonial domination.

Gordimer's early attempt to ground the trajectory of the novel in South Africa in a narrative of progression towards enlightenment is contradicted by the participation of the literary and particularly of accounts of its humanising value in the task of ideological discipline in the colonial context. A useful illustration of this hegemonizing role of the literary can be drawn from Ngugi's Decolonising the Mind (1986). Ngugi quotes Cheikh Amidou Kane on the way the violence of initial colonial penetration was followed by the psychological violence inflicted by the colonial classroom.

On the Black Continent, one began to understand that their real power resided not at all in the cannons of the first morning but in what followed the cannons. Therefore behind the cannons was the new school. The new school had the nature of both the cannon and the magnet. From the cannon it took the efficiency of a fighting weapon. But better than the cannon it made the conquests permanent. The cannon forces the body and the school fascinates the soul (in Ngugi, 1986: 9).

There is an instructive homophony between the "cannons" of blunt colonial power and the "canons" of literary tradition. The school, and the values it imparts--the values of the "Graeco-Latin pedestal ... the triumph of the human individual, of clarity and of beauty", of which Fanon speaks so scathingly (1967: 36)--is as much an instrument of colonial hegemony as the repressive apparatuses of military power that are the guarantee, in the last instance, of the stability of the colonial order. The curriculum and the canon it transmits, the touchstones of truth and beauty of the English literary heritage are revealed as part of the process of delivering colonial subjects into the economy and forms of sociality of the colonial state.

Gordimer's rejection of the coloniality and marginality of the South African literary tradition generates the problem of a prospective mode of writing that is not compromised by its ongoing association with discredited colonial mechanisms of representation. The question she faces is: how does one write in a way that does not replicate the colonial order of representation of others in the dominative interests of self? I shall consider an aspect of Gordimer's response to this question in the next chapter.

IV

Coetzee's definition of "white writing", grounded as it is upon a conviction that the present South African social formation is a species of colonialism, can be considered a retrospective theoretical formulation of the concerns of his fictional writing of the 1970s.

According to Attwell, while Coetzee's work demonstrates a strong identification with the discourses of structuralism and poststructuralism, the synchronic features of these discourses are relocated within a diachronic colonialism-decolonisation-postcolonialism "master narrative" that underlies Coetzee's understanding of South African history (1990: 98). The existence of such a "master narrative" is attested to both by Coetzee's "white writing" formulation and by his earlier remark that, in his view, the South African "experience remains largely colonial" (1978: 24). Watson has remarked on the centrality to Coetzee's fiction of this experience of South African reality: "Given his particular understanding of the historical process of which present-day South Africa is both product and part, as well as of its importance, it is not surprising that JM Coetzee's four novels to date should all be situated in colonial times and should deal with one or other of the various aspects of colonialism" (1986: 370). Thus Coetzee's first

novel, Dusklands (1974), deconstructs the fictions of exoticism and barbarity that underwrite colonial conquest and aggression. The novel dissects the processes whereby the alien topography of the colonial wilderness is domesticated by being rewritten in the terms of a Western system of recognition. The same logic of the colonial construction of its objects of knowledge while claiming merely to represent them, is found to inform the coloniser's relations with the people of the territory. In the Heart of the Country (1977) again engages with the question of how colonial relations are written, parasitically inhabiting the textual forms of its colonial predecessors, in this case a major tradition of South African literature, that of "romantic pastoral" (Dovey, 1988: 10). In Waiting for the Barbarians (1980), set on an ideal-typical imperial frontier, Coetzee dissects the atomised, doomed forms of dissidence available in the face of the implacable manicheism of the colonial situation. The story of self told by Coetzee's magistrate replicates the self-justifications of the narrators of the novels of liberal humanism. But, in the context of a dying empire in which he finds himself, the magistrate runs up against the violence of both the colonial system and of the system of representation in which he is the unwilling participant.

These remarks make clear the extent to which, at least on the level of content, Coetzee's writing concerns itself with a colonial problematic. But, equally, this concern with the coloniality of the South African experience and its literary history can be found operating on the level of form. For Watson, Dusklands deviates sufficiently from the South African literary canon to be taken to inaugurate a "modernist" or "postmodernist" moment in South African literature. "Never before", states Watson, "had a South African novel broken so obviously, even self-consciously, with the conventions of realism and so candidly announced its own artificiality, its own

fictionality" (1986: 372). For Dovey, the novel has clear technical affinities with the metafiction and fake documentaries of the American postmodernists (particularly Barth, Gass, Barthelme, Brautigan) (1988: 67). According to Dovey, the novel appropriates characteristically postmodernist self-reflexive narrative strategies in order to distance itself not only from the content of its colonial history, but equally from the forms with which that history is written. Put more simply, Dusklands (and the texts that follow it) is concerned to exhibit its distance from its narratological as well as cultural conditions of possibility, rooted as they are in colonial structures. Moreover, the novels are concerned with the possible complicity of certain forms of representation in the general project of colonialism. As Dovey writes, "the colonizing activity and the modes of writing it serves to allegorize have their source in the same quest for identity and the same historical trend towards individualism, individuation and selfhood, which manifests itself as an assertion of mastery" (1988: 70).

V

But, however technically exceptional Coetzee's transformations of his "particular understanding" of the construction of South African society into the content of his writing, the examples of Kirkwood and Gordimer make clear that such an "understanding" is not peculiar to him. A concern with the coloniality of the present South African situation and with the origins of that situation in a colonial past can be found in a number of works of the period.

Stephen Clingman has provided a useful schematic account of a series of paradigm shifts detectable in South African literature, of which the new writing of the 1970s is the most recent. Clingman argues that there is a "sequence of shifts in temporal preoccupation"

in the South African literature of the last one hundred years. For Clingman, these shifts constitute "crucial historical signposting of deeper transformations of consciousness in society" (1990a: 42, 43). The ancestor-texts of South African literature, Schreiner's The Story of an African Farm (1883) and Plaatje's Mhudi (c. 1920), written in the midst of epochal changes, react to the demands made by their present situations by concerning themselves with a disappeared or disappearing past. However, according to Clingman, this concern with an absent past gives way, in the writing that follows, to an immersion in the present. The demands of the present moment at once produce and limit the South African literature of the period between 1920 and 1970, containing it as a conceptual horizon. It is not until the 1980s that a further shift in literary perspective becomes evident: "If there has been this shift over the course of the century away from concerns with the past and towards successive engagements with the present, now it seems South African literature has a new obsession: it is preoccupied with issues of the future" (Clingman, 1990a: 43). In the context of the growing crisis in South Africa, the "future" that the literature of the period finds itself facing is that of revolution (1990a: 44). Clingman's narrative of South African literary history frames the discontinuous instances of the individual texts making up that history; the texts can be considered as demonstrations or anticipations of the literary tendencies or the historical processes to which they are responses. Thus Clingman is able to accord to Schoeman's Na die geliefde land (1972) and Gordimer's The Conservationist (1974) the status of vanguard-texts of a literary tendency that had become relatively commonplace by the 1980s.

Clingman's account of a series of shifts in ideological orientation in the past one hundred years of South African literature provides a useful means of mapping the relation between the literary texts under consideration here and the wider social situation which

they occupy and in which they participate. The analysis turns on his theorisation that the texts make visible a wider "ideological shift" that had been conditioned by the state of economic and political crisis that South Africa entered in the 1970s. The texts of the period register with varying degrees of sensitivity the strain inflicted by societal crisis upon what Raymond Williams has described as a "sense of absolute because experienced reality" (1980: 39), the habits of consciousness disseminated and underwritten by the dominant culture. As the structures supporting white hegemony begin to crack, literary texts provide seismic warnings of future upheaval: "the novels of the 1970s perhaps stand as advance signals of a fundamental historical change in South Africa; especially ... in terms of what the crisis of subjectivity signifies--the destabilization of a whole framework of reality and its eventual replacement" (Clingman, 1986: 155).

For Clingman, the definitive feature of this "framework of reality" is that it is colonial. Earlier, in his book on Gordimer, Clingman argued that "[The Conservationist] stands, especially when taken together with other tendencies within white fiction of the early 1970s, as part of the next great literary signposting, after Schreiner, in the history of a colonial consciousness in South Africa (1986: 136; cf Clingman 1990b: 151). To elaborate: Schreiner and Plaatje can be taken to inaugurate the "colonial problematic" that is to tax the South African literature that follows them. Their work revolves around the questions of origin, belonging and possession that arise in the colonial situation, a situation in which, as Fanon has demonstrated, neither settler nor native can be at home: "This hostile world ... represents not merely a hell from which the swiftest flight possible is desirable, but also a paradise close at hand which is guarded by terrible watchdogs" (Fanon, 1967: 41). But, again following Fanon, it is this very unendurability of the colonial

situation that generates the necessity and the form of its overturn: "In decolonization, there is therefore the need of a complete calling in question of the colonial situation. If we wish to describe it precisely, we might find it in the well-known words: 'The last shall be first and the first last'" (1967: 28). The texts of the 1970s and 1980s are thus extensions of the central project of South African literature since Schreiner and Plaatje--the representation of an untenable present. But, at the same time, they are significant variations upon that project in that they are newly concerned with the apocalyptic possibility of the end of that present. It is this awareness of the imminence of decolonisation, as well as a Fanonian figuring of decolonisation as a vindictory setting right of what colonisation had overturned, that is illustrated in the concluding sentences of The Conservationist: "at last; he had come back. He took possession of this earth, theirs; one of them" (1974: 267).

Following Clingman then, the texts of the 1970s face, at the end of a long history of colonisation, a revolutionary future. They imagine that future, or they imagine revolution, as decolonisation. In the writing of the period we find a working through of the concerns generated by a situation at once intolerable and precarious. In the particular case of the dissident white writer, neither identifying with the present order nor with any secure grounding in the order of the future, the precariousness of this situation generates only uncertainty. The white writing of the 1970s can be seen as a differentiated set of attempts to negotiate a way out of the interim, the terrain of the "not yet". In the "new, neocolonial" period of South African history described by Coetzee, white writing becomes increasingly threatened by and determined to distance itself from all that renders it "white". Accordingly, two lines of questioning connected to apprehensions of a revolutionary future can be found threaded through the texts of the period: a reflective question--how

did we get here, to such a point?--and a speculative one--what future do we have here? Both questions and the responses that they generate are the result of wider social crisis and, in particular, of the destabilisation of the cultural sphere that forms part of that crisis. The first line of questioning provides some context for the fact that Gordimer's The Conservationist, along with a number of the literary texts and literary criticism by white writers and critics of the period, is critically disposed towards not only general colonial history, but equally towards the implication of literary production in that history. In turn, the set of pressures that prompt the second question help to explain the preoccupation of South African literary and cultural discourses during this period with the issue of the artist's or writer's responsibility.

VI

Following Said, the connections between works of art and artists could, before modernism, be perceived organically. Narratives of literary history told of one generation of artists giving birth to another, or of the authority of the monumental works of the culture that have preceded the individual artist and that are seen to have given rise to his or her horizons of ambition and possibility. But, in the reified conditions that follow the penetration of the market relation into the sphere of the cultural such organic conceptions of the connections between works of art and culture and their society, or between artists and their contemporaries or predecessors, are no longer available. A mode of compensation for the loss of authoritative tradition or community lies in the structures, institutions and discourses of affiliation.

Freud's psychoanalytic guild and Lukács's notion of the vanguard party are no less providers of what we might call a restored authority. The new hierarchy or, if it is less a hierarchy than

a community, the new community is greater than the individual adherent or member, just as the father is greater by virtue of seniority than the sons and daughters; the ideas, the values, and the systematic totalizing world-view validated by the new affiliative order are all bearers of authority too, with the result that something resembling a cultural system is established. Thus if the filial relationship was held together by natural bonds and natural forms of authority--involving obedience, fear, love, respect, and instinctual conflict--the new affiliative relationship changes the bonds into what seem to be transpersonal forms--such as guild consciousness, consensus, collegiality, professional respect, class, and the hegemony of a dominant culture. The filiative scheme belongs to the realms of "nature" and "life", whereas affiliation belongs exclusively to culture and society. (Said, 1983: 19-20)

The examples of Kirkwood, Coetzee and Gordimer have demonstrated a comparable rejection of the filiative claims of a discredited liberal tradition by modernist white writers and critics. According to Attwell, Coetzee's novels demonstrate a rejection of the filiative claims of the liberal-colonial literary tradition. What is then seen played out in the sequence of Coetzee's novels is a "search within an affiliative culture of intellectual and literary-critical relationships--affiliation that undeniably requires the institutional base provided by scholarship, specifically by universities ..." (1990: 117). Coetzee's first two novels, argues Attwell,

can be described as delivering a critique of the forms of filiation that must be felt as chains of imprisonment by any critical or reflective white South African. The sheer violence and at times almost oppressive power, as well as the avant-garde features of the prose in these novels, reveal a struggle from within the colonialism, with its attendant discourses, that defines the affiliative structure (1990: 117).

A similar process of rejection of the claims of established cultural and intellectual formations has been seen in the general revisionist activity of the period.

In attempting the prospective activity of affiliating themselves with an alternative culture, literary writers and critics are faced with the unrevised coloniality of the situation which they occupy.

Having distanced themselves from the hegemony, they confront the fact that there is no easy access to the emergent cultural formations associated with nationalist movements. Clearly, though revisionist intellectuals have rejected white power, they will continue to feel its baleful effects as long as the structures of that power remain in place. During the 1970s and early 1980s, a central problematic that modernist white writing must confront, is precisely the obstinate whiteness that continues to identify it with the very system from which it wishes to distance itself.

FOUR

I

I have argued that the revisionist "movement" within a number of academic disciplines develops as a response to the erosion of white intellectual hegemony and the gathering crisis of the neocolonial status quo. Revisionist scholars sought to rid themselves of the cumbersome and outmoded ideological baggage inherited from liberalism, baggage they found to be unsuited to the accelerating pace of social and economic change during the 1970s. Whatever the variety of innovations that revisionism brought to long-unchallenged paradigms, a common feature of the early manifestations of the movement is an initial critical examination of the complicity of existing intellectual practice in the project of white domination. Persuasive intertexts for this examination were provided by the critical anti-humanism of structuralist, poststructuralist and postcolonial thought. In its drive to rid itself of any further association with the institutions of white power, and frustrated in its attempts to form affiliations with emergent social forces, revisionism then gravitates towards an attitude of intellectual vanguardism. Nevertheless, Turner's example has revealed the uncertainty of revisionism's practitioners about the pretensions of white intellectual activity to social leadership. The anti-intellectual rhetoric of the new populist movements and their suspicion of white, western theoretical innovation, provided a challenge to received understandings of the specialised and privileged position of the intellectual within society and the processes of production.

Postliberal white writing can now be situated within the general intellectual context it shares with academic revisionism, a context

which provokes in that writing similar responses of critical introspection and self-challenge. Equally, white writing performs the same uneasy negotiation seen in revisionist discourses, between, on the one hand, an avantgardist equation of theoretically self-conscious writing with revolution and, on the other, a pragmatic negativism, the "mute self-contradiction" identified by Eagleton as characteristic of Modernist art (Eagleton, 1990: 349).²⁹ Literary writers, as intellectuals, contribute to the creation, transmission and criticism of the ideas making up a culture (Sinfield, 122). But, however much it is a product of its intellectual context, literary writing and literary activity in general is not unproblematically homologous with developments in extraliterary spheres of activity. The modernist white writing and criticism of the period, preoccupied as it is with the question of the vocation of literary writing in conditions of social crisis, can thus be productively read as a response to the precarious situation of the white writer and of white writing in the shifting space of the literary-cultural during the 1970s. A central component of that situation, is, as the term "white writing" itself indicates, the existence of a racial division in South African literature, a division which postliberal literary developments both consolidate and render problematic.

II

The term "white writing", according to Coetzee, does not "imply the existence of a body of writing different in nature from black writing" (1988b: 11). But to delineate a "white writing" in a context in which cultural production is neither exempt from the pathological racism infecting South African society nor serenely unconcerned with it, is to effectively presume its separation and difference from "black writing". Coetzee's disclaimer seems to indicate, I would argue, that "white writing" cannot be essentialistically distinguished from "black" on the

basis of the racial origin and circumstances of its writers. Coetzee's conception of white writing can be characterised as, broadly, devolving upon a theory of literary production, as opposed to literary creation. Writing, for Coetzee, is generated by historical pressures, is subject to ideological impulses and to necessary closures. The effect of this model is to diminish the importance of the individual writer; the literary text is produced instead by "the pressure and play of extra-individual forces, rather like commodities manufactured in a factory, itself the intersection of economic and technological drives" (Berthoud, 1989: 81). This concentration on the structural, institutional and impersonal pressures which generate writing leave little room for conceptions of the individual writer's autonomy and capacity for initiative (Berthoud, 1989: 81). The picture of Coetzee's white writers which emerges from his readings of "the culture of letters in South Africa" is one of producers responding to pressure and limitation: employing the discursive material available to them in the service of both ideological as well as formal, literary aims, limited and directed by those same pressures. Thus, in Coetzee's readings of the novels of Sarah Gertrude Millin, we find the novelist's racism accounted for by the limited field of operation she occupies as a writer in her specific historical and social context. Millin, according to Coetzee, is "a child not only of the isolation and intellectual sterility of South African society but of the ethnocentrism of the sciences of man of her day" (1988b: 158-9). As a "child", Millin cannot be held responsible for her views or for their expression in her writing. The powerful racist discourses she draws upon for the content of her work, in turn encourage in her an uncontrolled, even obsessive, fascination with miscegenation and blood-mingling. For Coetzee, the interest of Millin's writing to the present-day reader lies not in its ideological repugnance, but rather in the way it represents a resolution of, on the one hand, the

sociohistorical pressures and their psychological cognates that impell the production of writing and, on the other, the constraints imposed by discursive raw material out of which that writing is produced:

Any view of Millin as a woman imbued with the racial prejudices of white South African society and using her novels as a means of propogating and justifying these prejudices must therefore be tempered by a view of her as a practising novelist adapting whatever models and theories lie to hand to make writing possible. (1988b: 162)

The existence of a distinguishable body of "white writing" within South African literature is thus the result of an extraliterary, contextual factor: its generation by a group of people caught up in (or, made "white" by) the problematic situation of the "not yet". Accordingly, a shift in the historical circumstances that at present produce a writing identifiable as white, could render the category redundant. But in the specific historical situation of the 1970s, where whiteness becomes marked out as the definitive sign of a threatened privilege, white writing can be expected to demonstrate considerable discomfort with the position it finds itself occupying.

It is significant that Coetzee's term mirrors the title of Richard Rive's autobiography Writing Black (1981). Rive explains his choice of title as intended to articulate his commitment to non-racialism while recording the reality of racial division which impedes the fulfilment of that commitment. And, like Coetzee's "white writing", Rive's formulation of the forms taken by "writing black" makes it clear that it is to be regarded as an interim phenomenon, necessitated by the pressures of the present historical situation, to be redeemed by inevitable historical process. "I look forward to the day", he comments, "when it will not be necessary for writing in my country to be tied to ethnic labels, when the only criteria will be writing well and writing South African" (1981: vii). Rive later ascribed the separatist impulses which led to the formulation of the programme of resistance set out in Writing Black to the state's tactic of isolating

and then targetting black writing and its writers during the 1960s and early 70s. Particularly, it was the banning of six prominent black writers during 1966 in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act that meant, for Rive, that "South African literature became white by law" (1989: 51). Though resistant to the state's attempts to choke off black writing, the self-consciously "black" writing of the 1970s nevertheless confirms the terms of the state-induced division of literature.

The brief flourish of black writing during the 1950s, primarily journalism and autobiography associated with the newspapers and magazines aimed at an emerging black reading public, had been silenced by the political turmoil of the post-Sharpeville period. The systematic repression of any but the most symbolic forms of black resistance saw many black writers banned, imprisoned or forced into exile, their writing further inhibited by a growing network of censorship laws (Visser, 1976). These events established and consolidated a racial division in South African literature. For a considerable period of time it was writing by blacks that was the target of censorship, while, for the most part, white writers escaped the full force of the various silencing mechanisms. Gordimer has suggested that this disparity can be accounted for by the state's conception of the difference in audience and style between black and white writers--the white "critical and protestant", the black "inspirational" and hence more likely to fan the flames of insurrection (1988: 215). However much this might be the case, it should be added that the relative freedom from direct censorship enjoyed by white writers is a mark of racial privilege, a measure of the degree of access to due process and publicity available within the enclave of white power. The result of the silencing of black literature has been described as a "literary vacuum", with white writers more isolated than

ever from the writing and the everyday existential realities of their black counterparts (Rich, 1982: 55).

Though the preferential treatment of white writers was not maintained, it had, by the 1970s, wrought considerable damage to the possibility of nonracial unity among writers. The articulation of varying forms of political protest and commitment by white writers led, during the 1970s, to a confrontation with the state. Brink's novel Kennis van die Aand (1973), banned in 1974 under the provisions of the Publications Act, became the first novel in Afrikaans by a white writer to suffer this form of censorship.³⁰ With this event commences a period Brink terms the strydperk, a "phase of more or less naked confrontation between dissident writers and censors" that continues until the 1980s (Coetzee, 1990: 59; Brink, 1983, 1985a, 1985b).³¹ Writing in 1982, Brink argued that the direction of censorship mechanisms against white writers during the second half of the 1970s had the result that "a new awareness of a common [nonracial] identity as writers has arisen, creating a new sense of solidarity in a body of informed and articulate resistance to oppression" (1983: 253). But this unity-in-adversity of writers ran up against the demographic and political polarisations that resulted from the burgeoning crisis of apartheid society. Further, the racial division of literature set in place by selective state repression was consolidated by the cultural influence of the ideology and organisations of Black Consciousness. As Brink notes, a symbol of potential nonracial writerly unity, the Soweto branch of the PEN club, found itself split apart along racial lines (1983: 254). The branch closed down in 1981, effectively as a result of the Black Consciousness-motivated boycott of "multi-racial" organisations. It was not until the revival of the fortunes of the ideology and organisational structures of nonracialism during the mid-1980s that deracialised cultural alliances were again made possible.

III

The Black Consciousness Movement attempted to set up new affiliative structures aimed at encouraging and directing cultural production and bypassing what was seen as the white liberal stranglehold upon publishing and criticism (Sole, 1983: 50). The Movement was successful in promoting cultural revival, initially giving emphasis and support to oral and participative forms such as poetry and drama. This concentration on non-written forms, necessitated by pressures of censorship and by the urgings of populist ideology, initially kept the black literary revival out of the marketplace and out of the highly restricted purview of mainstream literary studies (Vaughan, 1982a: 43). Some important poetry by black writers (notably Serote and Oswald Mtshali) had been published during the early part of the decade. But it was not until the latter half of the decade, however, that new written literature by black South Africans, aided by the establishment of Staffrider and Ravan Press and by the unprecedented flexibility of the censorship apparatus, decisively broke the long silence of the 1960s (Vaughan, 1984). The Soweto Revolt of 1976 gave impetus and thematic focus to the new writing. The Revolt visibly brought to an end the long history of undisputed white rule, demonstrating the new-found ability of the black population to challenge the control of the ruling class (Hirson, 1979: 9). As such, it represented a profoundly transforming experience for many black writers of the period, its impact summed up in a comment made by a character in Serote's novel To Every Birth its Blood (1981): "South Africa will never be the same again, you know why? People have realised, have discovered who they are, and what they can do" (1981b: 193). To self-discovery can be added other central thematic concerns of the new writing, "revolt, death, detention and exile", themes appropriate to the centrality of the experience of the Revolt and its repression in the lives of black writers (Mzamane, 1988: 5). While the bulk of the new writing was

poetry, a significant number of black writers began, during the latter half of the 1970s, to employ the medium of prose fiction and the novel, written in English (Sole, 1988: 65).

The attentions of a repressive state and the pressures of political necessity combined to give considerable unity to the formal and thematic interests of the black writing of the 1970s and 1980s: "A particular sense of a history in opposition, a frequently troubled awareness of a shared destiny under oppression and of efforts to end that oppression and transform the society, are the qualities that most commonly characterize black writing" (Trump, 1990: 165). To this list could be added an acute sensitivity to the elitist implications of individual literary activity and of literary language and form. "A writer", commented Mafika Gwala, "cannot throw straw on this country's controversial ideas, its centres of culture, its institutions of learning and yet use 'literary' language as opposed to the language of the people" (1989: 73). The uniform tendentiousness characteristic of the black writing of the 1970s can be attributed to its writers' desire to counteract the negative associations that attach to literary activity in a situation of crisis by stressing the potential political instrumentality of writing. The elitism and sheer material uselessness of art and literature is thus redeemed by giving emphasis to its cognitive and ethico-political capacities.

"I began to realise", Serote claimed of a turning-point in his early writing career, "that writing can become an instrument for liberation, can express what our people are fighting for" (Ngugi & Serote, 1988: 32). The critiques of Black Consciousness had revealed the relationship of white intellectual activity to political and economic privilege. Black writers were concerned not to be seen as attempting to procure similar privileges for themselves: "telling the world how my people are suffering and being hounded is more important than being a literary figure" (Gwala: 1989: 70). The anticolonial

critique of literary activity as an instrument of domination had tended to counteract popular prejudices holding it to be nothing more than a feminine realm of beauty or distraction, without any capacity for material intervention in the world. At the same time, the repression of openly political activity created an area of political opportunity for the relative obliquities of poetry and literary prose.

Consequently, writers influenced by Black Consciousness were able to compensate for the luxury of artistic production by stressing its instrumental capacity to further the aims of politics, and its liberatory potential if utilised in the service of the oppressed. Writers could offset the elitist associations of their activity by submitting it to the discipline and demands of political praxis, and writing in a form justifiable as informative, politicised, inspirational and emancipatory.

However, the mediating effects of the processes of reflection and the restraints of literary form tend to distance the writer from the social and political. This autonomy of literary practice, so valued by Modernist ideology, is for the populist writer a considerable liability: "Alienation for a cultural worker", Serote has asserted, "is shame and death" (Ngugi & Serote, 1988: 33). As a consequence, committed literature gives emphasis to "the specificity of setting, the familiarity of character, recognisable events in either recent or distant history, and other similar factors that ground a work in time and space" (Ndebele, 1984: 44). This bodying-forth of a familiar and readily-apprehensible actuality helps to contain the signals of literariness given off by a piece of writing:

In societies such as South Africa, where social, economic and political oppression is most stark, such conditions tend to enforce, almost with the power of natural law, overt tendentiousness in the artist's choice of subject matter, and in the handling of that subject matter. It is such tendentiousness which, because it can most easily be interpreted as "taking a position", earns a work of art displaying it, the title of "commitment", or "engagement". Clearly, then, according to this attitude, artistic merit or relevance, is determined less by a

work's internal coherence (a decisive principle for autonomy), than by the work's displaying a high level of explicit political preoccupation which may not necessarily be too critical of the demands of the artistic medium chosen. (Ndebele, 1984: 44)

In the social situation that Ndebele outlines, ethical or responsible writing is writing which looks like militancy and not like literature.

Consequent upon this suspicion of literary form is a series of aesthetic prescriptions to the writer. The literary-critical discourses associated with the Black Consciousness Movement promote an aesthetic that favours documentary forms engaged with perceptible reality or history, expressed in accessible and easily intelligible forms. Forms are favoured that are able to deal with a content which is of interest to the broadest possible range of people, a content which should be of motivational or informative use to them. The authenticity of a given piece of writing is measurable by the accuracy of its representation of immediate political concerns and the social conditions in which they take place:

We see the new writing as part of what is happening. It is a type of writing that is perfectly suited to the times. We need a writing that records exactly the situation we live in, and any type of writing which ignores the urgency of political events will be irrelevant. (Mutloatse et al., 1981: 42)

However, it is clear that more immediately documentary forms such as journalism and historiography are better disposed to record-keeping and truth-telling than is literary writing (Ndebele, 1984: 47). The writers of the 1970s consequently found themselves having to defend residual literary attributes such as style, personal utterance and subject-centeredness in their writing. The narrativisation of individual experience in the writing of the period, rather than being an account of existential particularity, thus tends to situate that experience within larger historical processes. "There is an intense need for self-expression among the oppressed in our country", Serote maintained. But, as he explained, this was not to encourage a project

of individuated utterance: "When I say self-expression I don't mean people saying something about themselves. I mean people making history consciously" (1981a: 32).

As the ambiguities of the term "making history consciously" indicate, the relationship of the new writing to an extrinsic, stable and ascertainable "truth" or "reality" is not as unproblematic as it would seem. The normative and conative interests of the writing direct the process of selection and organisation of its historical material, and, following the characteristic turn of ideological processes, describe what is constructed as the "real" or "natural". As Sole has demonstrated in a reading of the novels of the Soweto era:

On the one hand, these novels describe and extrapolate from political and social life in South Africa today. On the other, a political community of black people is being naturalized and called into action by both the activists in the novels and by the novels themselves. In constructing this community, the novelists to some degree ignore its social cleavages and contradictions. A process of structuring of social identity and political morality is indicated by these books, from the point of view of a radical intelligentsia denied access to political power and seeking to identify with and conscientize other blacks in a struggle for freedom. (Sole, 1988: 79-80)

As Fanon recognised, the imperatives of anticolonial resistance engender a manichaeian politics of truth: "Truth is that which hurries on the break-up of the colonialist regime; it is that which promotes the emergence of the nation; it is all that protects the native, and ruins the foreigners" (1967: 39). Similar concerns in the South African situation encouraged the formulation of a politicised literary aesthetic, which, though nominally realistic, is infused with the propagandising or didactic preoccupations associated with its political activism (Sole, 1988: 69).

The formal inconsistency between the black writing of the 1970s and an ideal-typical "realism" indicates that, in the South African context at least, "realism" and "modernism" function not so much as formal or stylistic descriptions but rather as characterising historic

modifications to the cultural sphere and to the social function of art and literature:

Seen ... in social terms, the moment of realism can be grasped ... as the conquest of a kind of cultural, ideological, and narrative literacy by a new class or group: in that case, there will be formal analogies between such moments, even though they are chronologically distinct from each other. Thus, as Colin MacCabe has suggested, one may see the "realist moment of film carrying out some of the ideological tasks for the 20th century industrial working class that the 19th century realist novel had undertaken for the bourgeoisie" (Jameson, 1991: 156).

The realist novel developed as a form coterminously with the globally transforming economic and political systems of capitalism. Its purpose can be seen as conservative in function, as the cultural representative of the dominative and dispossessing logic of the developing capitalist system out of which it emerges. However, the extension of the logic of the market into the sphere of human relations brings with it a corresponding rationalisation of cognitive experience. The realist novel then functions as a form of compensation for what has been lost: "to [the novel's] subjective and critical, analytic, corrosive mission must now be added the task of producing as though for the first time that very life world, that very "referent"--the newly quantifiable space of extension and market equivalence, the new rhythms of measurable time, the new secular and "disenchanted" object world of the commodity system, with its post-traditional daily life and its bewilderingly empirical, "meaningless", and contingent Umwelt--of which this new narrative discourse will then claim to be the "realistic" reflection (Jameson, 1981: 152). In the South African case, the realist novel becomes a vehicle for the nationalist project of constituting and mobilising a cross-class alliance against the white state, in search of economic and political power:

Perhaps, then, Serote's choice of the novel as the privileged vehicle for the process which he depicts in To Every Birth Its Blood is not so strange; and neither is the fusion of linear time with national aspirations and national identity among black people in the latter stages of his narrative. The regulation--in this

case re-definition and re-regulation-- of time can bind together groups of people and individuals who conceive of themselves as part of the same social entity, even if they are strangers to each other. The same conception of identity among strangers who nevertheless identify themselves as part of a common social bonding is essential to nationalism. (Sole, 1991: 70-1)

During the latter part of the decade a shift towards a gradualist politics of hegemonic struggle was to give additional strategic weight to the activities of cultural production. The Soweto Revolt had undermined monolithic conceptions of the system and of its adherents and antagonists, thereby exposing the fractures concealed by theoretical delineations of South African society into two seamless antithetical blocs. The divide-and-rule reforms instituted by the state, coupled with its attempts to widen the extent of consent to its rule, required oppositional forces to seek new alliances, as well as new forms and terrains of struggle (Swilling, 1988). Recognising this, the ANC in 1978-1979 shifted its understanding of its strategic task from an emphasis on armed insurrection to political mobilisation and organisation of the wider population, "carving open and occupying legal and semi-legal space inside South Africa" (Barrell, 1990: 43). Accordingly, hegemonic struggle--the "elaboration of a set of ideas, countervalues, cultural styles, which are virtual or anticipatory, in the sense that they 'correspond' to a material, institutional base that has not yet 'in reality' been secured by political revolution itself" (Jameson, 1988b.: 49)--assumes increasing importance in the last years of the decade. It is in such a context, that culture comes, as was increasingly to be the case in the 1980s, to be regarded as an instrument of struggle. The repression of mass action necessitated a degree of acculturation of politics. As a consequence, discussions of culture came to be dominated by issues of political obligation and by demands for a politically-committed literary practice. In recognition of the groundswell of cultural production resulting from the accelerating pace of political development, cultural associations were

formed with broadly political agendas and sets of interests, allied to mass-based political movements: "The call to build a national culture in South Africa has become an important element of the political programmes of most organizations within the liberation movement" (Press, 1990: 22). Broadly, the "national culture" campaign of these movements is aimed at the production of cultural discourses which would unify the diverse groups making up the disenfranchised majority in South Africa and direct them to the goal of national liberation. To this end the campaign attempts to recruit artists into an alliance with its programme and structures, encourages the democratic distribution of skills of producing and appreciating art and culture, and emphasises the need for forms both easily accessible to oppressed groups and which give expression to the histories and aspirations of those groups (Press, 1987: 36-7).

But there is little correspondence between the shifts in the terrain of political action and the fortunes of the politicised literary aesthetic that had emerged out of the period of Black Consciousness. Writing in 1989, Ndebele complained that while the brutal social polarities and injustices which dominated the content of the early protest literature of the 1960s and 1970s were being gradually replaced with a more subtle system of repressions and rewards, the flexibility of the state was not met with a correspondingly articulate cultural counter-strategy. Literary production and the literary-critical debates surrounding it remained locked into a binary master-code characteristic of early protest literature. The intervention of Black Consciousness, reversing the polarity in order to reposition the inferior term of the binary as the superior, had done nothing to transcend this fundamental master-code (1989: 44). Sole has pointed out that the debates surrounding the establishment of a "people's" or "national" culture during the mid-1980s tended to be restricted to the narrow terms established by the

earlier Black Consciousness-dominated debate (1983: 67). Moreover, Ndebele maintains, the debate on the ethically-proper position of the writer in the particular conditions of contemporary South African society have been restricted by the uncritical conceptions of the content and form of committed writing, deriving without reconstruction from the manicheism of the protest ethos (1989: 46). Accordingly, aesthetic and literary-critical discourses and much of the literary output associated with the national culture movement accordingly continues to circulate between the empiricism and idealism characteristic of the Black Consciousness-influenced literary activity of the 1970s (Sole, 1983: 66).

IV

The term "white writing" does not divide up South African literature in conventional linguistic nationalist terms, but instead in terms which derive from a history of neocolonial political practices. Accordingly, in addition to alluding to the broad terms of the racial division in South African literature, the term white writing covers the recent and related phenomenon of the increasing opening of the borders that have separated English from Afrikaans literature. This categorical boundary is rooted in a history of cultural mobilisation of Afrikaner ethnic nationalism³² in the service of economic and political interests: "Afrikaner literature ... initially was no more than a means to an end, that end being the political emancipation of the Afrikaner" (Brink & Coetzee, 1986: 9). While the phenomenon of the growing congruence between English and Afrikaans class interests, particularly since the Second World War, tends to deprive this division of some of its sociopolitical foundation, its continued existence is a measure of the residual power of the ideologies of ethnic nationalism in South Africa and the role they continue to play in political life. Afrikaans writers had retained a close relationship with the Afrikaner

nationalist-dominated state they had helped to establish (Ampie Coetzee, 1990: 345). This relationship isolated Afrikaans writing from the oppositional sphere in which black and white English writers operated. The division is further aided by the organisation of the primary institution of literary-critical and cultural discourses in South Africa, the universities. Here, a disciplinary division of South African literature into that covered by separate departments of English and Afrikaans Literature dominated by metropolitan traditions is maintained. However, the recent rise of alternative cultural structures promoting a unitary national culture has seen a further erosion of linguistic literary divisions and of the project of mobilising cultural initiative in the service of ethnic nationalisms.

Although the project of inventing an Afrikaner national consciousness in the service of anti-imperialist interests had preoccupied Afrikaans literary activity practically since its foundation, it was, ironically, not until the 1960s that the first concerted attempt was made by Afrikaans writers to liberate themselves and their writing "from the constraints of derivative, colonial forms" (Brink & Coetzee, 1986: 9). The movement that came to be known as the "Sestigers"³³ saw the rapid generation of a series of formal renovations in Afrikaans prose, producing a form of writing "weselik anders" from the mere "karring in die vanselfsprekende" that had occupied its predecessors (Brink, 1967: 125, emphasis original). On the level of content, the writers of the movement rebelled against direct representation of the actualities of the South African landscape and situation--the fiction of drought and poor whites that had hitherto dominated Afrikaans prose--searching instead for new stories to tell, as well as new ways of telling them. The Sestigers introduced into Afrikaans writing the styles of thought and literary form current in the Europe of the period--experimentalism, postmodernism, and particularly existentialism. The influence of new insights into the

nature of existential reality and experience led many writers of the movement to question accepted notions of the capacity of the novel to be a faithful representation or mirror-image of an unproblematic "reality". Instead, the Sestigers set out in their manifestoes theorisations of the novel as a specialised form of language, autonomous of extraliterary pressures, to be judged in terms of its own textual and formal strategies. In pursuance of its self-perceived attitude of "rebelliousness", the texts of the movement challenged the moral, religious and sexual taboos of mainstream Afrikaans culture (Galloway, 1990: 29).

A formative experience shared by many of the writers of the movement was a period of voluntary exile, usually in Europe and centered upon Paris. There, they experienced with exilic intensity the unfamiliarity of the present, the absence of the familiar. The motif of exile is appropriate as a characterisation of the movement and its troubled relationship with its native culture. In what Said has fruitfully termed "the perilous territory of not-belonging" (1984: 162), a form of Afrikaans prose writing developed differing dramatically from the writing of insiders which had hitherto dominated Afrikaans culture (Brink, 1983: 104-5; Ampie Coetzee, 1990: 344). The physical separation of these writers from the culture and society to which they belonged grew into a form of alienation. Thus, while their experience abroad was a directly enabling condition for the expansion of the stylistic horizons of Afrikaans literature, it was also the precipitant of what Brink has termed "existentialist agony" (1983: 105). The experience of many Sestigers was the nomadic, unhoused and schizoid state of exile. They were physically removed from their culture and community, yet they remained ineluctably connected to them: "Essentially they were torn between different sets of forces: Europe (through the existential nature of their experience and self-discovery) and Africa (through the nature of their language); the local and the

universal; the group and the individual" (Brink, 1983: 105). The nature of this experience required a refashioning of the expressive possibilities of the Afrikaans language itself. Brink describes the stimulation of escaping the narcosis that its long alliance with Afrikaner ethnic nationalism had imposed upon the language and its literature. The experience was that of exploration, the widening of frontiers, the conquest of new territory: "Every page we wrote was also a mapping of wild and new territories: not only in terms of the experience expressed, but primarily in terms of language" (Brink, 1983: 106).

In the end however, the avantgardism of the Sestigers was frustrated by the unshaken hegemony of the culture from which it attempted to distance itself. Increasingly, the work of the movement became the subject of the flattering attention of the cultural machinery of Afrikaner hegemony, was awarded prizes, published by establishment publishers and reviewed and marketed extensively in nationalist newspapers (Ampie Coetzee, 1990: 245). The Sestigers found themselves drawn into the deadly embrace of the nationalist cultural establishment, memorably described by Breyten Breytenbach as "the lords of culture and of tribal identity" (1984: 321). The critical distance the movement had attempted to establish for itself was efficiently closed by the machinery of the national culture: "it was not seen that the enfants terribles were endowing the Afrikaner establishment with a greater suppleness to resist real transformation, and simultaneously serving as lightning conductors to close the eyes and minds of people to the true death (and hope) moving deep down through the land" (Breytenbach, 1984: 323). What made such co-optation easier was that the very rebellion against the constraints of the nationalist culture, produced a literature with only marginal connection to South African realities, eschewing them in favour of a concern with universal existential agonies. While the movement could be said to have been

critical of colonial forms, it nevertheless found itself relying on the impetus of Western cultural fashion for its lead: "The umbilical cord still led to Europe, although the domicile was Africa" (Ampie Coetzee, 1990: 344). Brink's predictions, in a text that can be considered a manifesto, that the movement would fail unless it were to engage with, or come to terms with South African "aktualiteit", or the South African "gegewe", were confirmed (1967: 129-131).

Assessing the achievements of the movement in the essay "Tussen sestig en sewentig" (1968), Brink asserted that it had "in die loop van die afgelope dekade 'n bewuste stryd gevoer om van kolonialisme tot selfregering te vorder" (1985a: 43). But while the renewal in Afrikaans prose had certainly helped to free Afrikaans prose from a moribund literary tradition, it had not escape the reorganised disposition of political and cultural power that has been described as "neocolonial". The movement's fascination with high-tech formal innovations in European literature, its distance from political actuality and its enduring links with the hegemonic cultural establishment meant that its project of "selfregering" could not be disassociated with the self-government and internalised colonial-style power relations of South African society.

It was not until the defection of a number of intellectuals from Afrikaner culture and state institutions during the 1970s, that Afrikaans writing came to occupy the oppositional and culturally-isolated position that characterises the modernist white writing of the period. The increasing distance between dissident Afrikaans writing and the official culture of a hostile state is measurable by the banning of Kennis van die aand in 1974 and by Breytenbach's "show trial" and imprisonment in 1975, the latter representing a "sweeping propaganda victory" for the state (Lazarus, 1986: 179-80). Both events had a considerable politicising effect among hitherto-uncommitted Afrikaner intellectuals (Ampie Coetzee, 1990: 353. Earlier, in a paper

delivered to the UCT Summer School in 1973, Breytenbach had announced the death of the Sestiger movement and set out a survival strategy for Afrikaans literature in the deteriorating social and political conditions it faced.³⁴ This paper had a provocative effect on the Afrikaans literary scene, and was to become a central document in the growing debate on relationship between literature and politics, the political possibilities of literary activity and on the relationship between Afrikaans literary culture and the state (Galloway, 1990: 140-147). Since the delivery of the paper constitutes the first time Breytenbach had set out before an audience of Afrikaans writers and intellectuals the convictions that were to culminate in his imprisonment, it is worthwhile considering in detail his analysis of the prospects for literary activity in the 1970s.

The ideals of the Sestiger movement, Breytenbach claimed, had been compromised by the Nationalist culture which had tolerated and cultivated it for its own purposes. The movement served as the "watchdogs" and shock absorbers" of the white establishment, the very fact of its existence serving to prove the capacity of the enlightened state to tolerate ideological dissension (1980: 158). According to Lazarus,

[Breytenbach's] central contention was that no contemporary Afrikaans writing, not even that of the Sestiger writers, could possibly be free of the inhumanity, the stunted sensitivity, of Afrikanerdom in its Nationalist phase: "our literature, no matter how clever sometimes, is largely a product of our stagnation and our alienation and ... cannot be anything else, given the framework within which it originates. This state of affairs was not a matter of artistic choice. It was an objective determination, given in the nature of the environment in which Afrikaans writers were working. Afrikaans writers did not merely float on the surface of this environment, moreover. They belonged integrally to it. They were bound by its traditions, and were actively engaged in shaping its development. Apartheid had been sown, and was still being sown. And just as their predecessors had in the past, so the writers of the present were directly involved in the sowing process. At the very least, they were allowing it to continue. Their involvement served to bind them ever more tightly into the closed ranks of apartheid under siege. (1986: 173)

But, as Breytenbach pointed out, the state's reformist "forbearance" of the innovations of its writers, did not extend very far:

It's good, they say, that you wish to concern yourself with the freedom of the Afrikaner. But to meddle with the freedom of man, of the individual, which would necessitate an about-face within the framework of society--that's a horse of another colour so to speak. That's subversive. That is not of our people, but alien, they say. (1980: 155)

For Breytenbach, confronting the bleak future that he prophesies ("this night we now enter" [158]), the survival of Afrikaans and its writers depends on the rejection of such racial restrictions upon the social responsibility of writing. Drawing on the examples of Godard and Pasolini and the sociolinguistic theories of Jakobsen, Breytenbach argues that writing is capable of being wielded as a weapon against the status quo. Writing should pose a threat to the establishment, not dance to its tune. Afrikaans writers should detach themselves from their comfortable alliance with the state, Breytenbach argued. Rather than concern themselves with metaphysical revolt and novelties of form, writers should write about the here and now, the actual and political (1980: 160).

It can be immediately remarked that Breytenbach sets out a position largely consonant with Sartre's description of a littérature engagée capable of combatting the deleterious effect of the class-interests written into literature. However, Sartre's prescription that writers write for the emergent class of the future, is complicated for Breytenbach by a long history of zealous application of a politics of identity and otherness:

In that part of our blood which comes from Europe was the curse of superiority. We wanted to justify our power. And to do that we had to consolidate our tribal identity. We had to fence off, defend, offend. We had to entrench our otherness while retaining at the same time what we had won. We made our otherness the norm, the standard--and the ideal. And because our otherness is maintained at the expense of our fellow South Africans--and our South Africanhood--we felt threatened. (1980: 156)

The outcome of the guilt and isolation Breytenbach describes is a cognitive inadequacy, the failure of "whitish or off-white" South Africans to know their place: "What do we know of the rest of South Africa? Do we have any knowledge other than the fearful knowledge of the master?" (1980: 157).

For Breytenbach, apartheid and its predecessors are a subject-constituting project. The operation of an exclusionary otherness is intended to set in place a version of white identity antagonistically set off against what it is not. But, for Breytenbach, rather than creating a stable identity, this process results in a groundlessness, an inability to know either the same or the other. Writing in the face of the disruptive displacement of authority, the rejection of white rule by the forces of oppositional nationalism ("consciousness"), Breytenbach can find in the politics of identity only the source of his present predicament and the absence of any secure way out of it:

And in this night we now enter, the fires of nationalism will be fanned, will flare up even brighter and more destructive. It will be said that is "us" or "them"--without our knowing who "us" is, without our knowing "them". That side which we are going to have to choose, is it going to be a knowing choice? (1980: 158-9)

What is found set out in Breytenbach's paper then, is the central logic upon which much of his writing of the 1970s will be subtended: a negative critique of a situation that is found to be intolerable, but from which there seems to be little hope of escaping.

v

I have been arguing that, in a situation where the cultural sphere is divided along the lines of an increasingly racially-polarised political situation, white writing comes to be associated with the dangerous privileges attaching to its colour. It is for this reason that the modernist white writing of the 1970s finds it necessary to distance itself from increasingly discredited cultural institutions and from its

"white" literary tradition. In its consequent preoccupation with the formal and ideological assumptions of that tradition, white writing becomes distanced in turn from an emergent populist mode of writing which eschews aestheticist concerns in favour of a direct engagement with political actuality. Gordimer's essay, "Living in the interregnum" (1982), provides some clarification of these assertions. While the essay contains an account of the situational dilemmas confronting white writers during the 1970s, it is, as I will indicate, written from a position that is no longer wholly enclosed within that situation. As such, it provides an invaluable retrospective account of the situation of white writers and their writing in the period I have delineated.

Writing for an American audience³⁸, Gordimer describes herself as "a white; a dissident white; a white writer" in a South Africa occupying the "interregnum" between the protracted death of the old order and the birth of the new. The great wave of African national liberation struggles that had been moving southward since the 1950s, bringing about the violent demise of the settler regimes of Mozambique, Angola and Zimbabwe, was about to achieve a final victory: "The sun that never set over one or other of the nineteenth-century colonial empires is going down finally in South Africa" (220). In this precarious state of crisis and decline, the slow dissolution of the colonial order gives rise to "a great diversity of morbid symptoms" (1988: 220; cf Gramsci, 1971: 276). This Gramscian characterisation has acquired widespread currency in cultural discourses where it is employed as a description of the situation that had been reached in South Africa by the 1980s. At the end of a decade of erosion of its political and ideological authority, the state retained sufficient coercive power to frustrate the emergent oppositional political forces, while unable decisively to reestablish its dominance. This situation has been variously described as "stalled revolution", "unstable

equilibrium" or "virtual stalemate" (Wolpe, 1988: 103; Swilling, 1987: 421). But the motionlessness that is suggested by such terms, or the process of inert decay evoked by the Gramscian term, is deflected by Gordimer's description of the ambience of the interregnum:

I live at 6000 feet in a society whirling, stamping, swaying with the force of revolutionary change. The vision is heady; the image of the demonic dance--and accurate, not romantic: an image of actions springing from emotion, knocking deliberation aside. The city is Johannesburg, the country South Africa, and the time the last years of the colonial era in Africa. (220)

The dominating impression this description communicates is of a situation that is palpably unstable, unpredictable. There can be little certainty of its future, no idea which way it will go. The interregnum, notes Gordimer, is a "place of shifting ground" (235). Deprived of any secure footing, the writing that emerges from such a situation can be expected to show signs of disorientation, the energetic directionlessness that characterises its immediate context. "I am going, quite frequently," writes Gordimer, "to let events personally experienced as I was thinking towards or writing this paper interrupt theoretical flow, because this interaction--the essential disruption, this breaking in upon the existential coherence we call concept--is the very state of being I must attempt to convey" (220).

This concern with finding a form of writing appropriate to its own historical situation is, for Gordimer, an essential task imposed upon her as a "white writer" living in the interregnum. The question Gordimer confronts in the essay--how to write in such times?--is a result of the extension into the realm of writing of what Gordimer argues to be the particular preoccupation of dissident whites: finding ways in the unsettled present of securing a place in the future:

there is a segment [of the white population] preoccupied, in the interregnum, neither by plans to run away from nor merely by ways to survive physically and economically in the black state that is coming. I cannot give you numbers for this segment, but in measure of some sort of faith in the possibility of structuring society humanly, in the possession of skills and intellect to

devote to this end, there is something to offer the future. How to offer it is our preoccupation. Since skills, technical and intellectual, can be bought in markets other than those of the vanquished white power, although they are important as a commodity ready to hand, they do not constitute a claim on the future.

That claim rests on something else: how to offer one's self (222).

Gordimer distinguishes intellectual and technical knowledge, dismissed as commodities tradeable for some kind of insecure temporary residence in a new order, with a deeper level of belonging and acceptance. In order to be accepted as part of a future society, whites need to make an "offer" (in the sense of a presentation for acceptance or rejection) significant, or attractive enough to create, if it is accepted, a "claim on the future". At first glance, the problematic Gordimer confronts here turns upon the logic of sacrifice and reward underpinning the concept of commitment. What must be given up, Gordimer asks, what risks taken in the interim so as to ensure a place in the future? But the legal language of Gordimer's formulation undercuts the nobler sense of "offer" as sacrifice. A sacrifice creates no obligation on the part of its recipient or any "claim" on the part of the offerer. A sacrifice can be noted or ignored. The language of claim and contract with which the necessity for finding acceptable forms of commitment is set out here, indicates that Gordimer is able to assume the existence of an interlocutor willing to be the recipient of her offer. Once accepted, the offer can become the basis of a "claim". But the reaction of Gordimer's interlocutor is a matter of uncertainty, the subject of what is described as a "Pascalian wager" (226). "I can only report", Gordimer writes, "that the way to begin entering history out of a dying white regime is through setbacks, encouragements and rebuffs from others, and frequent disappointments in oneself" (233).

That Gordimer is able to consider the possibility, however tentatively, that she as a white writer may acquire something as

substantial as a "claim on the future" is the result of a crucial shift in the wider situation to which her essay is a response. While the historical situation Gordimer describes and from which she writes was still conditioned by the structural crisis entered in the 1970s, at least one of the pressures felt by white writers had begun to show signs of easing. A crucial political shift became evident by the end of the decade--the waning of the ideological energy, "the phasing out or passing usefulness", of the Black Consciousness Movement (1988: 226). This shift is acutely felt by Gordimer, for whom the exclusionary ideology of the Movement, ruling out any capacity for whites to negate the implications of their race and identify themselves with the cause of the oppressed, had been particularly distressing (Clingman, 1986: 182). But while the upturn in the fortunes of nonracial alliance politics in South Africa brought new possibilities of a role for white writers in the liberation struggle and in the new order it aimed to bring about, the events of the 1970s had entrenched a racial division in South African literature.

In the context of terminal deterioration of the colonial status quo, outlined by Gordimer, a mode of writing identifiable as "white" will tend to be disposed of as one of the "morbid symptoms" of the dying racial order. White writing will be coloured by its association with a settler culture determined to outlive its historical moment, marked by the increasing social displacement of the segment of South African society of which it is the cultural analogue: "The black writer is 'in history' and its values threaten to force out the transcendent ones of art. The white, as writer and South African, does not know his place 'in history' at this stage, in this time" (231).

The destabilisation of the colonial order necessitates a revision of the habits of subjectivity authorised by such an order. "In the official South African consciousness, the ego is white: it has always seen South Africa as ordered around it", notes Gordimer (221). But

"the hierarchy of perception that white institutions and living habits implant throughout daily experience in every white, from childhood" cannot be maintained in the present uncertain times.

The interregnum is not only between two social orders but also between two identities, one known and discarded, the other unknown and undetermined. Whatever the human cost of the liberation struggle, whatever "Manichaeian poisons" must be absorbed as stimulants in the interregnum, the black knows he will be at home, at last, in the future. The white who has declared himself or herself for that future, who belongs to the white segment that was never at home in white supremacy, does not know whether he will find his home at last. It is assumed, not only by racists, that this depends entirely on the willingness of blacks to let him in; but we, if we live out our situation consciously, proceeding from the Pascalian wager that the home of the white African exists, know that this depends also on our finding our way there out of the perceptual clutter of curled photographs of master and servant relationships, the 78 rpms of history repeating the conditioning of the past. (226).

We can extrapolate from these remarks a number of generalisations about the conduct of white writers who, like Gordimer, inhabit the interregnum and are determined to survive it. First, in facing the future, the white writing of the seventies begins by examining its past: the "curled photographs" and "78 rpms" that impede progress towards a new consciousness of situation. This examination takes the form of an initial negation; white writing distances itself from a relationship of simple identity with the settler culture of the past, adopting instead a critical orientation towards its cultural history. This orientation is most usefully described by invoking Gramsci's assertion that the "starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory" (1971: 324). In her book on African literature, The Black Interpreters (1973b), Gordimer recognised the necessity of "the attempt to assess the past not just in the moral-tale terms of wicked conqueror and wretched victim, but also as an interaction of human concepts of destiny, in all their

painstakingly justified self-interest and self-accomodating idealism" (15). Gordimer adverts here to the tendency of the ideological nature of a particular mode of orientation to reality to become obscured by frequency of use. This softening of the ideological into the habitual requires the disillusioning effort of historical reconstruction to lay bare the origins of what appears commonsensical, to reveal the interests it serves and the lines of power that are threaded through it: "The recreation of the past in imaginative writing is one of the ways by which a people may learn to recognise such phenomena in themselves" (Gordimer, 1973b: 15-6). Restoring the hidden history of colonial modes of thought and orientation, entails tracing their institutional origins and the constituencies they serve. Such a project is a commencement of the process of "unlearning" the modes of thought that have become habitual in a society with a colonial history, clearing away the "perceptual clutter" that remain even when the institutions and structures of colonialism have been dismantled (Said, 1978: 28).

But, in turn, this critical process of historical "recreation" comes to view the instruments of that recreation critically. Gramsci's prescription for critical thought, that of an enquiry into the historical processes of which the enquirer is the product, must logically require an acceptance that the enquiry too is potentially a mere effect of historical process. Perhaps the clearest demonstration of this paradoxical logic in a text of the period can be found in Coetzee's Dusklands. It is a text which foregrounds the question of the implication of the present in the construction of the past. The second part of the novel--The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee--is a fictive "work of history" (1974: 108) that stresses, in the process of its historical recreation, the "work" that goes into the representation of history. The project of writing history is found to bear upon the project of the self: history is written in order to construct a stable

identity in the present that can then turn to the task of the reconstruction of the past. In Coetzee's novel, the present, the past and the forms they make available to the work of historical reconstruction are found to be colonial. Coetzee thus utilises the capacity of postmodernist strategies to foreground epistemological controversy, thereby distancing himself from the realist narrations that derive their certainty from being underwritten by a "system of power that authorizes certain representations while blocking, prohibiting or invalidating others" (Owens, 1983: 61). By drawing on the critical impetus and theoretical resources of Western European structuralism, Coetzee uncovers the origins of contemporary habits of thought and writing in a colonial past: "These structuralists question humanism by exposing its hero--the sovereign subject as author, the subject of authority, legitimacy and power. There is an affinity between the imperialist subject and the subject of humanism" (Spivak, 1987: 202).

But the introspective and aestheticist concerns of white writing produce a form of writing alienated from its own cultural traditions and institutions and unable to participate in the emerging literary project of a popular-realism operating under the governance of political interests:

This [Brechtian] mode of writing was the beginning of the black writer's function as a revolutionary; it was also the beginning of a conception of himself differing from that of the white writer's self-image. The black writer's consciousness of himself as a writer comes now from his participation in those living conditions; in the judgement of his people, that is what makes him a writer--the authority of the experience itself, not the way he perceives it and transforms it into words. (230)

The black and white postliberal writing of the 1970s is accordingly divided along formal lines. The enforced unity of a black population targetted uniformly by apartheid repression and the practice of politically-instrumentalist writing had provided a way for the black writer to "break the alienation of the artist/elitist in the black mass

of industrial workers and peasants" (231). But the dissident white writer is at once too close to the benefits of power and too distant from any existing community to facilitate a similar commitment:

.The white writer has to make the decision whether to remain responsible to the dying white order--and even as dissident, if he goes no further than that position, he remains negatively within the white order--or to declare himself positively as answerable to the order struggling to be born. And to declare himself for the latter is only the beginning; as it is for whites in a less specialised position, only more so. He has to try to find a way to reconcile the irreconcilable within himself, establish his relation to the culture of a new kind of posited community, non-racial but conceived with and led by blacks. (232-3).

Formulated here in imperative language is the necessity for white writers to detach themselves from the old order and associate themselves with the new in a manner substantial enough to go beyond mere declaration. This contrasts with the hesitancy ("try to find a way", "a new kind of posited community") of Gordimer's directions to the locality in which new attachments should be sought. This circulation between, on the one hand, a rejection of the past and a commitment to combating its continued influence upon the present, and, on the other, a consequent disorientation in the face of an uncertain future, is the logic upon which much of the essay is subtended. "We whites", Gordimer claims, "have still to thrust the spade under the roots of our lives" (227). In the interregnum, the forms of belonging associated with the old order are no longer tenable. Gordimer's metaphor condemns whites to self-inflicted deracination and not-belonging, without any clear prospect of rootedness in the order of the future.

While her situation as a white writer in the interregnum condemns Gordimer to an exilic and alienated state, modernist ideology presents her with a opportunity to defend the value of the alienated perspective and the writing it produces. In the concluding section, I will examine Gordimer's qualified modernist defence of her aesthetic principles and practice.

VII

I would argue that it is the issue of commitment that is a key term directing the series of formal shifts Gordimer's writing undergoes as it moves away from liberal aesthetics. An examination of Gordimer's critical writing and public utterances during the postliberal period, indicates that the central question that she confronts is that of how to write in such times. The ambiguous interrogative--how--indicates that there are two levels of enquiry contained in Gordimer's question: that into possibility and that into means. The pressing urgencies of political crisis militate against the private and reflective processes of literary writing. Equally, those same urgencies tend to make the writing that does get done susceptible to the charge that it is unethical. While the concept of commitment seems to offer a way to continue writing ethically, the pressures towards a tendentious and uniform mode of writing entailed in the version of commitment circulating in the South Africa of the 1970s, frustrate the fulfilment of such commitment by a white writer such as Gordimer, who is both isolated by social privilege and who draws on the self-critical resources of western modernism and postmodernism to enable her writing. The imperatives of commitment that derive from the Black Consciousness period direct one to write about about here and now and to write for and about the people who have been left out of writing altogether. But, as has been indicated, the pressures of Gordimer's situation as a white writer (of which a schematic list would cover: censorship, the apartheid-created divisions of existential reality, conditions of mass-illiteracy, the separatist tendencies of the forces of opposition to the apartheid order) militate against the production of an adequately committed writing. It is Gordimer's inability to comply with the prescriptions of commitment that compels her to a defence of the ideological and formal autonomy of her aesthetic practice. The

progress of Gordimer's enquiry into the possibilities and parameters of an authentic literary practice and her attempted resolutions of the opposing pressures she confronts can be followed in the essay "The essential gesture" (1984). The essay presents a convenient assembly of the positions in respect of the issue of commitment that Gordimer had been developing in response to changing cultural conditions since the early 1970s.

Gordimer describes her first attempt at writing "at the age of nine or ten" as "what I have come to believe is the only real innocence--an act without responsibility" (1988: 238). But such innocence is no longer possible in a fallen world where "[r]esponsibility is what waits outside the Eden of creativity" (239). The specific conditions of the contemporary South African social order demand "responsibility for the social significance of being a writer ... : a double demand, the first from the oppressed to act as spokesperson for them, the second, from the state, to take punishment for that act" (240). These demands are perceived as weighty, a "burden", and contradict the directions of the impulse to creativity. This results, for the writer, in a "opposition of inner and outer demands": the "inner" (creativity; the solitary, introspective, self-reflexive act of writing; the tendency of literary writing towards style, personal utterance, private language) subjected to the pressures of the "outer" (the social, historical, the "world situation" of the writer [242]).³⁶ This characterisation of the contradictory pressures upon writing, between a "creativity" originating from inner pressures and desires ("this most solitary and deeply marvellous of secrets--the urge to make with words " [239]) and the outer pressures of the social and historical, replicates the familiar notion of the incommensurability of the libidinal and the social, the line drawn between "art" and "society". In certain situations however, what Jameson has termed the "ratio of the political to the personal" (1986:

69) is weighted in favour of the political or Gordimer's "outer" realm. The value of the "inner" becomes so diminished that writing ends altogether; the writer abandons the indefensible activity of writing and enters wholly the realm of the "outer", becoming an activist, a soldier. Gordimer quotes Camus's remark: "It is from the moment when I shall no longer be more than a writer that I shall cease to write" (242). In the face of a particular confluence of external pressures, writing comes to be seen as, at best, an activity supplementary to political activism, at worst, redundant.

Camus's conviction of the insufficiency of "mere" writing is, according to Gordimer, prompted by a "demand outside himself", the pressure of his historical situation (1988: 242). In contemporary South Africa similar series of pressures bears upon the "mere" writer. A reconciliatory possibility exists in continuing to write, yet to write in such a way as to contain the signals of inwardness emitted by literary writing; writing in a form which may be justified as a contribution to the project of liberation. This is the context of the emergence of what Gordimer terms the "honourable category" of "cultural worker" whereby "there is--just--the possibility for a writer to be only a writer, in terms of activity, and yet 'more than a writer' in terms of fulfilling the demands of his society" (244). The recovery of nonracialism during the 1980s had given white writers the opportunity of fulfilling the requirements of acting as a "cultural worker". In Barbara Masekela's definition, cultural workers "are an integral part of the overall struggle, not artists who merely contemplate on the cataclysms of our era" (1989: 252). The category offers then a form of belonging, distinguished from the contemplative distance of the "artist", a distance which implies isolation and alienation. The integration of the individual artist into the general process of the struggle, the willing or prudent submission of the artist to the overall discipline of the political movement, are demanded in exchange

for the multiple forms of support which an affiliative structure provides. As Gordimer points out, the category and the "national culture" project with which it is associated, emerges from the politicisation of culture in the wake of the insurgent 1970s:

The [1976] uprising began as a revolt of youth and it brought to writers a new consciousness--bold, incantatory, messianically reckless. It also placed new demands upon them in the essential gesture that bound them to a people springing about on the balls of their feet before dawn-streaks of freedom and the threat of death. Private emotions were inevitably outlawed by political activists who had no time for any; black writers were expected to prove their blackness as a revolutionary condition by submitting to an unwritten orthodoxy of interpretation and representation in their work. I stress unwritten because there was no Writer's Union to be expelled from. But there was a company of political leaders, intellectuals, and the new category of the alert young, shaming others with their physical and mental bravery, to ostracise a book of poems or prose if it were found to be irrelevant to the formal creation of an image of people anonymously, often spontaneously heroic. (1988: 245)

This passage makes clear the ambivalence of Gordimer's response to the emergent "national culture" project. However sympathetic she is to the project, Gordimer finds in the aesthetic prescriptions that it promulgates a discomfoting conflation of solidarity with conformity. The modernist aspects of her work, which defend the heterodox, the particular, the different, tend to view with scepticism demands for a uniformity of political purpose and expressive form. The description of a "people springing about on the balls of their feet before dawn-streaks of freedom" bring to mind the visual rhetoric of socialist realism. Equally, comparisons with expulsion from a "Writer's Union" serve, in spite of Gordimer's negative phrasing, to introduce the spectre of Stalinist policing of writerly dissidence. At the same time, Gordimer recognises the "shaming" irrelevance of writing that does not respect the heroism of political activism.

Gordimer's own "essential gesture" is towards a synthesis of the oppositions she has identified, thereby attempting to reconcile the pressures of responsibility and the writer's tendencies towards

inwardness: "Will the world let him, and will he know how to be the ideal of the writer as a social being, Walter Benjamin's story-teller, the one 'who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story'?" (1988, 250). Yet it has been shown that in Gordimer's schema it is the "inner" which favours the production of writing, while the demands of the "outer" at times threaten to put an end to writing. Thus Gordimer's description of "creativity" as an "Eden" can be used to direct a reading against the grain of her essay: on the one hand, that the inner realm of "pure" creativity is essentially unreal and mythological; on the other hand, that creativity is edenic insofar as it remains desired, yearned for, directing us to what has been lost, the place from which the world has fallen. It becomes possible to describe Gordimer's conception of creativity here as utopian, following the twin connotations of that word: as a sense of dissatisfaction with the present either on the basis of a metaphysical nostalgia for what is no longer and cannot be, or, on the basis of a sense of what things ought to be, a projected point of resolution of the "stubborn negation" of things as they are now (cf Jameson, 1974: 111). On this basis, the "inner" site of creativity, the private realm of writing, can be read as either a lamented lost state of grace, or a gesture to the future: in both cases a site of desire.

It should be stressed that it is the realm of the "inner" which remains, in Gordimer's conception, the realm of a writer's freedom, the "outer" being the source of pressure and limitation: "Everywhere in the world, [the writer] needs to be left alone and at the same time to have a vital connection with others; needs artistic freedom and knows it cannot exist without its wider context ..." (1988: 250). In the "Interregnum" essay, Gordimer stresses that the particular demands of her situation require of her "compromises" and "sacrifices", and

require a relinquishing of aesthetic principles which could elsewhere, at another time, be maintained:

There are two absolutes in my life. One is that racism is evil--human damnation in the Old Testament sense, and no compromises, as well as sacrifices, should be too great in the fight against it. The other is that a writer is a being in whose sensibility is fused what Lukacs calls "the duality of inwardness and outside world", and he must never be asked to sunder this union. The coexistence of these absolutes often seems irreconcilable within one life, for me. In another country, another time, they would present no conflict because they would operate in unrelated parts of existence; in South Africa now they have to be coordinates for which the coupling must be found. The morality of life and the morality of art have broken out of their categories in social flux. If you cannot reconcile them, they cannot be kept from one another's throats within you. (1988: 231-2)

In the face of the "irreconcilable", support for one side of the warring categories must be abandoned. This is less the product of an ethical decision than a matter of the writer's survival, a response compelled by the pressure of situation. This conclusion can be drawn from the unequivocality of Gordimer's language here: "have to be", "must be", "have broken", "cannot". It remains unclear whether Gordimer feels she has been able to reconcile the "irreconcilable": "If you cannot reconcile them ...".

Gordimer thus confronts the problem of finding mediations between the private, inner realm that is both the source of writing and a place of refuge from the stricken outer world of division and conflict, and the ethical demands made on the writer by the outer and the social. Unable to accept the compromises entailed in the "cultural worker" position, nor able to endorse an opposite tendency such as the narcissistic formalism of the nouveau roman, Gordimer opts instead for a modernist defence of the speciality and autonomy of artistic practice. "The transformation of experience", Gordimer maintains, "remains the writer's basic essential gesture; the lifting out of a limited category something that reveals its full meaning and

significance only when the writer's imagination has expanded it" (249).

She continues:

Writers in South Africa who are "only writers" are sometimes reproached by those, black and white, who are in practical revolutionary terms "more than writers", for writing of events as if they themselves had been at the heart of action, endurance and suffering. ... their claim to generalize and speak for a human predicament in extremity comes from the lesser or greater extent of their ability to do so; and the development of that ability is their responsibility towards those with whom they are united by this extrapolation of suffering and resistance. (1988: 250)

Gordimer is concerned to defend the consideration of individual "ability" that is threatened by its association with the discredited cause of personal ambition. For Adorno, writing in a time where collective politics no longer held any potential for liberation, "even part of the social force of liberation may have temporarily withdrawn to the individual sphere" (1974: 18). Gordimer, confined to the situation of a white writer, kept from emergent collective politics by the constraints of her racial and class privileges, mounts a similar defence of the individual sphere and its literary cognates: self-consciousness, style, the body. However, it is a measure of the situation she occupies that the individual sphere is at once a source of anxiety and of writing itself.

VIII

We have seen that in Coetzee's literary-critical model, writing seems to emerge from some unspecified impulse to write (Millin as "a practising novelist adapting whatever models and theories lie to hand to make writing possible" [1988b: 162]), an impulse which is directed and constrained by social and historical pressures. It is these pressures, issuing from what Gordimer terms the "outer", which determines the form of the literary work. There is little space given in Coetzee's model to Gordimer's "inner" realm, from where issues the

initial impulse to write. All that remains of Gordimer's charged private and personal space of creativity, is something approaching sheer technique or skill: "Was Van den Heever unable to achieve smoother, more deceptive, more 'natural', less 'dualistic' effects simply because he was a clumsy novelist? Yes; but this is only part of the answer" (1988b: 114).

But it is against this same mode of reading that Coetzee he articulates a modernist defence of the autonomy of writing. In a speech delivered at the 1987 Weekly Mail Book Week, Coetzee, "[s]peaking as a novelist", set out "some observations on the relation of novels and novel-writing to the time and place in which we live" (1988a: 2). This relation between writing and situation turns out to one of opposition. Coetzee refers to the tendency ("a powerful tendency, perhaps even dominant tendency" [2]), in this place and in these times, to subsume the novel under history. Specifically, Coetzee cites the politicised demands (associated with the "national culture" project) that novels retell the story of the "historical present" of which the definitive account has already been given by the discourse of history, that they investigate "real historical forces and circumstances"; he cites too a perceived tendency to devalue those novels which do not perform such investigations (2). These demands amount to censorship, "laying down rules that stories may not transgress, and enforcing these rules" (3), rules which amount to the allocation of "stories" to a supplementary position, required to fill out and enhance the master-discourse of history. Thus, "in times of intense ideological pressure like the present, the relationship between the novel and history is placed under strain (3)". The novel, novel-writing, story-telling in general are threatened with "colonisation", consumption by the "appropriating appetite of the discourse of history" (3). The historical modes of reading and the prescriptions placed upon writing are nevertheless contextual phenomena, the product of "times of

intense ideological pressure like the present" (3). Thus it is possible to imagine a time when history and the novel are able to coexist peacefully "like two cows on the same pasture". In the meantime novel-writing faces the stark choice between co-option and exclusion, belonging and isolation.

It can be noted that the particular conception of history here is as determining, pressurizing, limiting. It is the work of its historical situation that writing is white: the fact of a particular body of writing's generation out of a particular position within the narrative framework of process from colonialism towards decolonisation. But there is a sense also, in Coetzee's conception, in which history is salvational, promising delivery from an intolerable present. It is therefore possible to project a time when writing can no longer be white: when the drawn-out era of the "not yet" in which white writing finds itself is ended. It is similarly possible to project a time when the relationship between writing as impulse and the impulses of history is not one of limitation, but rather of mutuality. Thus at the conclusion of his examination of some South African versions of pastoral--the farm novel and the plaasroman--Coetzee comments self-reflexively upon his own reading practice and on the model of literary production which subtends that practice:

Our ears today are finely attuned to modes of silence. We have been brought up on the music of Webern: substantial silence structured by tracings of sound. Our craft is all in reading the other: gaps, inverses, undersides; the veiled; the dark, the buried, the feminine; alterities. To a pastoral novel like The Beadle we give an antipastoral reading like the present one, alert to the spaces in the text (Where is God? Where is Africa?). Only part of the truth, such a reading asserts, resides in what writing says of the hitherto unsaid; for the rest, its truth lies in what it dare not say for the sake of its own safety, or what it does not know about itself: in its silences. It is a mode of reading which, subverting the dominant, is in peril, like all triumphant subversion, of becoming the dominant in turn. Is it a version of utopianism (or pastoralism) to look forward (or backward) to the day when the truth will be (or was) what is said, not what is not said, when we will hear (or heard) music as sound upon silence, not silence between sounds? (1988b: 81)

It is a complex moment, structured upon an equipoise of oppositions: a turning-away (not here, not now) at the end of a consideration of the (to us, here and now) culpable turning-away that constitutes the pastoral mode; a looking forward and backward, lush pastoralism in the midst of a dry and scholarly consideration of edenic desires; green dreams in an arid landscape. Arguably, the contemporary white writing which Coetzee seeks to defend occupies the very situation of sustained paradox described here. It is a form of writing committed to the sounding of silences, insofar as, in its sustained negative critique of the colonial history ingrained in the forms of a colonial aesthetic, it strives to bring to the surface what has long been repressed. But such an activity is precarious, vulnerable to the unsympathetic and subversive reading of its own subversions. Behind Coetzee's utopian formulation lies the anxiety of white writing: it falls only between, it is no longer where it was, but it is not yet anywhere else. It is a fiction orientated toward the other, not yet capable of occupying the place of that other. Finally, Coetzee's gesture to a future where there will no longer exist the present antinomy between writing and reading enables us to describe the present master-discourses which would translate writing into a mere allegory of its situation: modes of discourse which turn "writing" into "white writing". Coetzee articulates the desire that what is presently turned into white writing by the mechanisms of situation should no longer be taken to be an allegory of its situation but rather itself--writing. Coetzee's fiction can, it is argued, be productively considered to be set out upon a resistance to all that would limit it to its situation. The formal strategies which turn Coetzee's fiction in upon itself--(its self-reflexivity, its insistence on its materiality as writing, its designation of the processes of its own material production as its content); all that would seem to limit it to mere writing, unresponsive

to its situation and hence irresponsible--can be interpreted as a form of resistance to the confinement of situation.

I have quoted Coetzee's remarks here in order to point up a deficiency in this study of the literary activity of the 1970s. The theoretical grounding of my understanding of literary form and the category of modernism has been the contention that both the formal characteristics of an individual text and aesthetic phenomena in general should be considered to be ideological productions. Following Jameson, "ideology is not something which informs or invests symbolic production; rather the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal 'solutions' to unresolvable social contradictions" (1981: 79). Accordingly, the appearance of certain modes of writing in a particular context can be read as an attempt to resolve the contradictory pressures brought to bear by a particular historical situation. Rather than confining a text to the mere reflection of its social ground, by interpreting form itself as the social content of aesthetic production such a reading respects the specificity of literary or artistic activity: "symbolic action ... is a way of doing something to the world, to that degree what we are calling 'world' must inhere within it, as the content it has to take up into itself in order to submit it to the transformations of form" (Jameson, 1981: 81). This requires a dual reading. The first attempts to reconstruct the set of determinants generating a text and its reception and which govern the valencies of its use in various contexts and among various constituencies. The second concerns itself with the implications of considering the text as a form of ideological wish-fulfilment, the way it looks forward or backward to a world that is without contradiction, taking into account what Adorno felt to be the "deepest and most fundamental promise" found in all art--ohne Angst leben (Jameson, 1971:

35). What has been neglected in this study then is a consideration of the interim utopias set up within the literary texts of the period. In Coetzee's resistance to the appropriating mechanisms which colonise texts, we are reminded of the properly political sense in which such texts are utopian: reminders of the world we have lost and the world we have yet to gain, which in turn undo the mechanisms of forgetting which makes us take our situation for our world.

NOTES

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1 I use upper-case "Modernism" here as shorthand for a historically and geographically-specific aesthetic movement--canonical Western Modernism. More idiosyncratically, lower-case "modernism" refers to the space within cultural life occupied by non-popular forms, self-consciously distinguished from their own aesthetic traditions and from their popular or "mass" cultural competitors.

2 For a survey of this body of work see Ashcroft et al., 1989; Young, 1990.

3 Nor indeed do they remain consistent within Fanon's critique itself. As Adele Jinadu points out, there is "an uneasy combination of ethical relativism and ethical universalism in Fanon" (1986: 152). While Fanon denounces the universalist pretensions of Western humanism as a mask concealing the violence with which that universalism is ensured, he nevertheless claims for the anticolonial project supracultural humanist ambitions, as the closing peroration of The Wretched of the Earth indicates--"For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity comrades ... we must work out our concepts, and try to set afoot a new man" (1967: 255; Jinadu, 1986: 151-2).

But rather than attempting to unravel the ambiguities (or strategic) of Fanon's anti-humanism here, I am interested in the effect of a nominally dissonant and non-syncretic theory such as Fanon's upon universalist discourses such as liberal-humanism (cf Young, 1990: 156).

4 This term is employed to distinguish the aesthetic associated with the new social movements of the 1970s from the liberal-realism of the established South African literary tradition: "That 'reality' is rendered in a non-problematic mode, as immediately and concretely available to perception, is related to a conviction amongst writers that their work makes a contribution to the solution of urgent social and political tasks. However, the 'realism' of liberal aesthetics is based upon an ontology of the individual, whereas that of populist realism is based partly upon individualist conceptions, and partly upon conceptions of the collectivity--the community--the people" (Vaughan, 1982b: 133).

5 "The existential-phenomenological rhetoric of the Continental philosopher cannot mask the constant theme of the conservative fictionalist who would like to leave the living to the servants, but who couldn't respect himself if he did. I have called this the posture of existential aestheticism; probably a better term in view of Sartre's more critical side is, simply, guilty aestheticism" (Lentricchia, 1980: 53).

6 In existentialist terms, within the world of the novel the alienation of the self from the world and others is ended--the novel, created or read, is a synthesis of self and the world, a for-itself-in-itself (Aronson, 1980: 124).

7 Sartre, 1948: 13. "Presentation des Temps Modernes". Trans. Francoise Ehrman, quoted in Aronson, 1980: 117-8.

8 This contention is lent support by Stephen Clingman's study of Gordimer (1986, cf 1984a). According to Clingman, Gordimer's writing is both generated and limited by a fundamental subjective "split", which is in turn a product of the wider "systematic social fracture" within South African society (1986: 207). While Clingman concedes that "[i]deologically Gordimer's work has ranged both within and beyond her 'class' situation" (1986: 208), it is in the end unable to evade the fundamentally limiting effects of social split: "at a deep level the fact of limitation still applies" (1986: 208). This fundamental split is that between her own, white "world" (her existential situation as a middle-class white in contemporary South Africa) and the black "world" for which she longs but to which she cannot belong. Gordimer, an inhabitant of the fractured society bodied forth in her fiction, is cut off from the experience of the very people whom she desires to address. "On a deep level, therefore, a whole domain of South African life belongs to the "unconscious" of her fiction--the repressed black world that her writing cannot really be part of and from which (much like the individual unconscious) it cannot directly speak" (Clingman, 1986: 210).

On the subject of Gordimer's "solution" to the frustration by social fracture of subjective desire, Clingman refers to Sartre's concept of a "virtual public" (1986: 213). Gordimer locates her virtual public in a politically repressed yet forcefully emergent black world. However, since she is alienated from that public, unable to address it directly in its languages and forms, her writing therefore represents, Sartre-like, an asymptotic attempt to reach it: "if ... she cannot write directly for her virtual public, she can at least write towards it, addressing the question of its oppression, the justice of its cause and the eventuality of its triumph" (Clingman, 1986: 214). However, in the final chapter of this study, I will argue that Gordimer's reconciliation of the situational pressures she confronts as a writer depends on a more complex negotiation between the competing claims of modernism and commitment than would appear from Clingman's statement.

9 See Thody (1977) for an account of the polemical tone of Writing Degree Zero as a mode of compensation for Barthes's enforced inactivity during the war and Occupation. cf Fages, 1979: 22.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

10 On the subject of the controversial status within historiography of periodization itself, I should note that this study is not intended to provide an exhaustive or homogenizing description of the historical period in question. Rather my intention is to sketch

something like the "look" of the times, the parameters of the historical situation that produces and limits writing. Such an account is intended to be sufficiently widely-focussed to allow for the possibility of the exceptional (in Raymond Williams's sense of the "residual" or "emergent") (Williams, 1980: 40; Jameson, 1988: 178-80). Following Jameson, "period" is best understood "not as some omnipresent and uniform shared style or way of thinking and acting, but rather as the sharing of an objective situation, to which a whole range of varied responses and creative innovations is then possible, but always within that situation's structural limits" (1988: 179). A description of a given "period" should attempt to give a sense of the articulation of the historical and textual in terms other than those of "background" and "foreground" with which much historicising literary criticism is constructed, terms which are, moreover, particularly problematic in the contemporary South African situation where history is frequently seen as intrusively present, "fierce and feverish, baring its deformities and demanding immediate attention" (Bundy, 1990: 140).

11 Though the measurable significance of the successful decolonisation of these three countries is in its effect on the state's military and political strategies, the encouraging example of successful liberation struggles conducted by military means against technologically-sophisticated European powers was an important psychological factor contributing towards ending the relative quiescence of the decade which had followed Sharpeville (Stadler 1987, 20).

12 See, eg., Sepamla's A Ride on the Whirlwind (1981), Serote's To Every Birth its Blood (1981), Gordimer's Burger's Daughter (1979), and (though their treatment of the subject is more oblique) Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians (1980) and La Guma's Time of the Butcherbird (1979).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

13 By analogy with Benedict Anderson's term "official nationalism"--"something emanating from the state, and serving the interests of the state first and foremost" (1983: 145).

14 In spite of this endorsement of cross-disciplinary enquiry, and while versions of revisionism do find their way into a wide range of academic disciplines, the influence of revisionism upon the field of South African historiography is perhaps the most far-reaching and is certainly the most thoroughly documented. It is for that reason that I draw most of my contextual material from recent accounts of the emergence of the "new history".

15 The best-documented example of which is the rise of the "social history" school and the History Workshop Project (Bozzoli, 1990).

16 See Randall (1973), the final co-ordinated report of the Project, for an overview of the work of the commissions.

17 Rich reports a comment by Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert, at a seminar on strategies for political change held in 1973, to the effect that the book's utopianism "led it away from the path of feasible political action" (1989: 12).

18 It is interesting to speculate whether this distinction results from the presence of a version of Sartre in Turner's analysis that is absent from later revisionism. Turner wrote his doctorate in Paris in the late 1960s on the political work of Sartre, and his book shows clear signs of Sartrean influence (Morphet, 1980: xiv). Certainly, Turner's work at times performs a Sartrean negotiation between the determining effect of transindividual forces upon human action and the material effect of intentional individual action. In addition, Turner is sensitive to the inertia and density of social institutions in place, the phenomenon Sartre termed, in The Critique of Dialectical Reason, the "practico-inert" (Young, 1990: 31; Jameson, 1971: 244-6). Clearly, for Turner, the "practico-inert" institutions of colonialism order and circumscribe relationships between people and their relationship to their material environment, whatever their conscious intentions may be. "In South Africa," he claimed, "whites as well as blacks are victims of the social structure" (1980: 10). The solidity of that social structure neutralises individual oppositional efforts, and frustrates the formation of political collectivities (the Sartrean "group") capable of dislodging it.

19 There is no shortage of such histories. Gerhart (1978) situates the Black Consciousness Movement within the longer South African political tradition of African nationalism. Hirson's (1979) account, which forms part of his history of the 1976 Soweto Revolt, is useful, though it is strongly coloured by his determination to relegate the Movement to its theoretically proper place--trailing behind the pace-setting black working class. Equally, Hirson is dismissive of the Movement's estimation of cultural work, which he treats as an index of its limited following among an aspirant intelligentsia. Fatton (1986) is less critical. While his book does give attention to the cultural impact of Black Consciousness, he is far more concerned with arguing for the Movement's crucial transformative role in South African politics. Most recently, Mangena (1989) offers an autobiographical account of the Movement, written from his perspective as a rank and file member and later as National Organiser of the BPC. Sole (1983, 1986, 1988, 1989, 1991) has comprehensively assessed the degree of influence of the Movement's ideology and cultural initiatives on the black writing of the 1970s and 1980s.

20 The term refers to the ideology expressive of a situation where the dominant social contradiction is not that between classes, but is nevertheless overdetermined by class contradiction: where "the dominated sectors would not identify themselves as a class but as 'the other', 'the counterposed' to the dominant power bloc, as the underdog. If the first contradiction--at the level of mode of production--is expressed on the ideological level in the interpellation of the agents as a class, this second contradiction is expressed through the interpellation of the agents as the people. The first contradiction is the sphere of class struggle; the second that of popular-democratic

struggle" (Laclau, 1977: 106-7, emphasis in original; cf Saul & Gelb, 1986: 153, 162).

21 Liberalism shared this stage with an "opportunistic" class of bureaucrats and entrepreneurs in the bantustans, which carried on a one-sided "dialogue" with the regime in exchange for political and economic favour within the apartheid-created bureaucracies (Saul & Gelb, 1986: 102; Lodge, 1983: 322). The most significant political actor to make use of the opportunities provided by segregation was Inkatha, which mobilised a conservative ethnic nationalism around the symbols of the Zulu past, at the same time maintaining an ambiguous relationship with white power (Marks, 1986). The organisation seems to have had little impact upon the elite, urban cultural scene described here.

22 On the phenomenon of Academic Freedom lecture see Rich, 1984b: 133-4, who regards these events as exemplary signs of the degeneration of liberalism's substantive political activity into empty ritual.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

23 The case of Wilbur Smith demonstrates that the broad terms of this distinction continue to be maintained. Smith's writing represents a capable playing of the market in colonial nostalgia. His novels are a persistence of the "masculine and racially divided world of colonialism" given expression in the writing of Kipling, Buchan and Rider Haggard (Rich, 1983: 428; cf Maughan-Brown, 1990). Smith's mobilisation of colonial dreams and anxieties have resulted in massive national and international popularity (50 million copies sold of twenty novels [Maughan-Brown, 1990: 134]). By contrast, the modernist strain of South African writing occupies the contemporary mutations of the restricted markets of the liberal-realist tradition, and are contained within the realm of "elite" or "academic" culture locally, and marketed internationally as "testimony", or as the "novels of information" whereby metropolitan reading publics keep up with politically-charged national situations and the interesting cultural products they generate. This replicates the paradox of the contemporary "Third World novel" which, however concerned with national dilemmas or agonies, remains essentially a minority form nationally, and communicates most widely within what are essentially neo-colonial international networks of information distribution (Brennan, 1990: 56). Thus Jane Kramer suggests that, rather than mere pleasure or distraction, modernist white writing offers catharsis--"tonic cataclysm"--to its Western readership. "We judge South African writers less by their quality than by the risks they take in putting the wall of their own dissidence between ourselves and the black Africa we praise and fear. We love them for being South African for us. They are our surrogates in resistance" (1982: 8).

24 The conference is a sequel to the Sestiger conference held in 1973, discussed below pp138-141.

25 The term is Gordimer's, describing the unreality of the continent of magical plenitude and community projected by the Négritude poets (Gordimer, 1973b: 6).

26 This terminology follows Bhabha's description of historicist and teleological narratives of literary production (of which Leavis's "Great Tradition" has perhaps been the most influential in the colonial situation) as providing an account of "Literature and History, as well as the history of literature" that enables "a perspective of essential order, coherence, culmination and Culture" (1984: 94). The Tradition narrative is continuist in that its beginning and end are connected; the tradition is driven forward by the desire to reach the point at which it began. This seems particularly descriptive of the liberal-realist "tradition" in South African literature, where the "line" could be said to be, in effect, looped. Schreiner's novel so dominates the tradition that the succeeding novels "take The Story of an African Farm as a sole common origin without significant regard to intermediate variations" (Gray, 1979: 136).

27 Gordimer's understanding of this fact on the level of the immediate macropolitical events of the early seventies is demonstrated by an appendix to "The novel and the nation" essay, written in 1972. There, Gordimer revised her earlier conclusion that the contemporary South African novel was "making heard" the dialogue that is, in Nietzsche's aphorism, the beginning of truth: "Finally, I quoted Nietzsche in my essay: Truth begins in dialogue. No need to point out, from hindsight, that it was not the kind of dialogue sought after by Mr Vorster that I had in mind" (1972a.: 52). Gordimer refers here to Vorster's "outward looking" policy of "dialogue" with African states that was intended to move towards eventual "détente". This movement towards improved relations with the rest of Africa was enabled by the degree of confidence in the continued prosperity and survival of the state and by the faith of western governments and local business elites in the long-term capacity of economic growth to correct the racist irrationalities that were the result of the apartheid system. The policy was a revision of the earlier confrontational attitudes of the South African state towards a rapidly decolonising Africa, and, on one level, is the forerunner of the "reform" policy of subsequent National party regimes. However, the actual results of the policy--which involved the cultivation of such dubious allies as the comprador regimes of Malawi and the Ivory Coast and the assumption of an interventionist military role in the various Southern African decolonisation struggles--amounted to a form of regional neo-colonialism (Clingman, 1986: 116). Internally, the "dialogue" policy amounted to the co-optation of the petty-bourgeois class in the bantustans. The indecisiveness of the liberal establishment in the face of the policy and the degree of political self-confidence on the part of the state that it reflects is a further measure of the political crisis facing liberalism (Rich, 1989: 5, 19).

28 The negativity of Gordimer's treatment of the literary tradition in the 1976 essay is made clear by her later softening of her line on Schreiner and African Farm. In a review of First and Scott's Olive Schreiner: A Biography (1980), Gordimer writes sympathetically of Schreiner's attempts to find a "form to carry her advanced

perceptions". It is admitted that Schreiner "was hampered crucially by the necessity of fighting the ways of thought which imprisoned her and others, equipped only with the modes available within those concepts" (1980: 918). Gordimer's view of Schreiner thus moves, to employ Raymond Williams's terms, from a blunt dismissal of "historical error" to the sympathetic reconstruction of "historical perspective" (Williams, 1973: 10).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

29 It is particularly in the fiction of Coetzee that the latter tendency is most visible. Coetzee's description of the textual strategies of such works as Nabokov's Pale Fire, Barth's Lost in the Funhouse, Beckett's The Unnameable as a "poetics of failure, a program for constructing artefacts out of an endlessly regressive, etiolated self-consciousness lost in the labyrinth of language and endlessly failing to erect itself into autonomy" (1977b: 293), provides an interesting comparison with Eagleton's description of Modernism as an essaying of impossibility. According to Coetzee, the formal manoeuvre whereby a poem or fictive work ends by consuming itself is a familiar device. A poem which contains a retraction or denunciation of its own status nevertheless, by a paradoxical movement acquires the steady ontological status of the self-consuming artefact, in the very process of undermining its own pretensions to ontological self-sufficiency. But there is a difference between the self-cancelling found in Sterne and Cervantes and the more threatening game encountered in Eliot's Frustrack. For Eliot this self-consumption impinges both upon the self which is written and the self which writes, and the means whereby both purport to exist. For Coetzee, between the "adventures of the self" of nineteenth-century realism and the "metafictional commentaries on the fictionality of self" of modernism and postmodernism lies the decline of the romantic-liberal notion of the self (1977b: 293). The poetics of failure is a mode of compensation for this decline, a strategy for evading its subject-obliterating implications. How can I write the self when it does not exist, when it has no stability, no objectivity? Who is the I who seeks to write? The answers to these questions lie in the poetics of failure. I will write of the impossibility of success, I am prepared for it, it is what I am planning for. It is thus a poetics of paradox: "The poetics of failure is ambivalent through and through, and part of its ambivalence is that it must parade its ambivalence ... (1977b: 293)". The dooming absence of the sovereign self-consciousness which was once the hero of literature, is compensated for by a triumphant parading of its body. "The poetics of failure erects absence into presence by an undenied trick of prestidigitation, whose success nevertheless depends on the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing" (1977b: 293).

30 Shortly after the establishment of the Publications Act machinery in 1963, there was widespread speculation that two texts of the nascent Sestiger movement, Etienne Leroux's Sewe dae by die Silbersteins (1962) and Brink's Lobola vir die lewe (1962) would be banned. It is significant, however, that the objection to these texts was based on their "immorality" rather than any political

controversiality (Galloway, 1990: 28). The absence of any direct action against Afrikaans writers before 1974 should not obscure the inhibiting effect for those writers and their publishers of the mere presence of the censorship machinery (Galloway: 1990: 98-117). Brink has, since the 1960s, produced a body of writing that amounts to a comprehensive assessment of both the measurable and invisible effects of censorship upon contemporary South African literature. See Galloway, 1990: 323-24 for a bibliography of this work and Coetzee, 1990, for a overview of Brink's attitude to shifting trends in literary censorship.

31 The selective liberalisation of literary censorship during the 1980s (compensated for by the ability of the state to enforce its authority by other means) has been attributed to the recognition by the state of the political marginality of the print media (Coetzee, 1990). During the confrontational 1970s, however, the paranoid surveillance of white literary production by the state gave rise to inflated interpretations of its weight as an oppositional practice. Thus Brink, who is particularly ambivalent about equations of writing with political transgression, uses as the epigraph to his Literatuur in die strydperk (1985a) a remark of Italo Calvino: "nobody these days holds the written word in such high esteem as the police states ... Where it is the object of such attention, literature gains an extraordinary authority, inconceivable in countries where it is allowed to vegetate as an innocuous pastime, without risks". See Chapman, 1988 for a survey of literary censorship in the 1970s and 1980s.

32 The concept of "ethnic nationalism" finds its most purified expression in the discourses of the apartheid ideology (Sharp, 1988: 82-3). In the vision of ethnic nationalism "ethnic groups" and ethnic consciousness could at certain times take the form of a nationalism, attempting to win autonomy for a particular group from other groups seen as diluting or repressing it. Nationalism is thus seen as the developed and political expression of what are imagined as the deep ties of blood and language: "in everything 'natural' there is always something unchosen. In this way nation-ness is assimilated to skin-colour, gender, parentage and birth-era--all those things one cannot help" (Anderson, 1983: 131). The "core beliefs" of Afrikaner nationalism--that of an initial groepsgebondenheid maintained throughout the long history of the volk (obedient to the requirement that the nation be venerable, that it "loom out of an immemorial past" [Anderson, 1983: 19]), that the existence and destiny of the volk is the will of God or nature and not of human history (Sharp, 1988: 82-3)--were at a crucial point in South African history mobilised in the service of the economic interests of the Afrikaner. Writers played a vital role in this mobilisation. Against the disintegration of the older platteland communities by the effects of capitalist development and the urbanisation and proletarianisation of sectors of the volk, Afrikaner intellectuals and writers constructed powerful representations of a rural Gemeinschaft, mobilising and uniting the dispirited (and increasingly class-contradictory) volk by means of a nationalist narrative of blood and soil and a heroic past (O'Meara, 1983: 53-54).

33 For a history of the movement and an assessment of its situation in the history of Afrikaans literature, see Kannemeyer, 1983.

34 The paper, "A view from outside" ['n Blik van buite], is reproduced in Breytenbach's account of his short visit to South Africa in 1972-1973, A Season in Paradise (1980: 153-160).

35 The essay, as it appears in the collection The Essential Gesture, is a revised form of a lecture delivered by Gordimer to New York University's Institute of the Humanities in 1982 and published in the New York Review of Books of 20 January, 1983 (Gordimer, 1988: 274n.).

36 Gordimer's association of the self-consciousness and the somatic stimuli that produce writing with a pleasurable, though guilty, secrecy is a consistent topos in her work. In the autobiographical essay "A bolter and the invincible summer" (1963), Gordimer describes how, when she had run away from school she imagined attending another, "jolly, competitive, thrillingly loyal" (1988: 16). This invention of a more satisfactory life in order to compensate for the inadequacies of the real one, reveals to Gordimer "a device of the personality that, beginning at that very time perhaps, as a dream-defence, an escape, later became the practical sub-conscious cunning that enabled me to survive and grow in secret while projecting a totally different, camouflage image of myself" (1988: 16). The terms "device", "practical" and "cunning" indicate the tensions Gordimer experiences between the sensuous pleasures enabling writerly productivity and the guilt that it occasions. And, like the privileging of an edenic inner realm in the "Essential gesture" essay, it can be noted that it is the inner, "secret" world that is the source of survival and growth for Gordimer here. The outer world, by contrast, is the place where it is necessary to project a dissembling "camouflage image". Equally, in the image of the young Gordimer, alone in the summery veld, creating an imaginary school "to which I felt that I longed to belong" (1988: 16), are the terms of the dialectic between detachment (or alienation) and belonging (or conformity) that John Cooke has identified as central to her writing (1985).

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